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**A L S O   R A N**  

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**MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS**

**By MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS**

**ALSO RAN  
"OPEN, SESAME!"  
THE KING'S WIDOW  
THE LONELY STRONGHOLD  
A CASTLE TO LET  
THE DAUGHTER PAYS  
THE COST OF A PROMISE  
A DOUBTFUL CHARACTER  
A MAKE-SHIFT MARRIAGE  
OUT OF THE NIGHT  
GIRL FROM NOWHERE  
THE NOTORIOUS MISS LISLE**

**NEW YORK  
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY**



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# ALSO RAN

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BY

MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS'

AUTHOR OF "OPEN, SESAME!" "THE /  
LONELY STRONGHOLD," ETC.



NEW YORK  
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY



**36224A**

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**TO**  
**ERIC R. HANBY HOLMES**  
**BORN AND BRED**  
**IN "MICKLESHIRE"**  
**WITH LOVE**





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ALSO RAN





# ALSO RAN

## CHAPTER I

### A CONVALESCENT FLIRTATION

**B**UT, Matron, dear, I thought you set your face entirely against affairs between officers and nurses?"

The voice of Miss Bellairs was carefully emptied of all save innocent inquiry. She was standing upon a weed-grown terrace, resting her arms on a stained, mossy stone balustrade, and gazing down into the untidy, blossomy garden below. Garden and terrace alike belonged to the Croix-Rouge-Supplémentaire at Mauby-en-Grève, a rich Frenchman's seaside pleasure-house, transformed into a convalescent home for officers; for this was the autumn of the year 1918.

Miss Bellairs wore the uniform of a V.A.D.—and wore it, somehow, with a difference. You felt that she was a V.A.D. only because she had, for the moment, selected that pose; but that she might at any moment shake it off as easily and lightly as she now shook from her white finger a brimstone butterfly which had alighted there.

Mrs. Burke, the matron, a vigorous, weather-beaten Englishwoman who stood at her side, formed a complete contrast. She allowed her eyes to travel in the direction taken by those of her inconveniently beautiful assistant.

Just below them there was a straight alley, with a bowling-green beyond it. This green was kept mown by the energy of the Englishmen who largely used the Home, and seemed to be set in a hay-field, from which shot up unexpectedly clumps of fuchsia and golden rod, and thickets of climbing roses. At one end there was a semi-circular termination to the walk, roofed in pergola-wise; and under the shade so procured a wheeled couch had been installed, upon which reclined an officer, whose fingers—oddly white after his weeks in bed—were busy with a jig-saw puzzle.

At his side, some needlework in her hand, sat a Red Cross nurse. It was the hour before tea, when, at the Home, discipline was relaxed, and the nurses were supposed to have a little time to themselves.

This nurse was young, certainly. She was trim and slight, inclined to pallor, and in no wise noticeable. The ordinary person might describe her as a pleasant-looking little thing. Certainly she was not the type with whom the wary matron anticipates trouble. Adela Bellairs, now gazing down upon her from the terrace above, answered far better to that description.

Nobody could have found fault with the demeanour of Nurse Pennant, who sat demurely enough, trying to sew; but she was allowed no peace by her patient. Her entire attention was demanded, her eyes, her hands, her mind must be at his service. He could hardly, it seemed, fit a morsel of the puzzle into place without her assistance and advice.

His handsome eyes kept on seeking hers, his voice was sunk to that unmistakable tone which a man insensibly adopts when he woos.

"It's a curious thing," mused Matron thoughtfully. "I do not consider Nurse Pennant in any way alluring. She is emphatically not a flirt. I have never known her to make any kind of advance—in fact, she is a pattern

nurse. But—watching them as we do now—there can be very little doubt of *his* feeling, do you think?"

Miss Bellairs shot a swift glance at her. "You see it too. Then it has not been only my fancy."

"I have been increasingly aware of it for some days."

"Then you don't mean to try and stop it?"

Mrs. Burke hesitated a moment. Something in the tone made her apprehensive. "Do you know of any reason why I ought to stop it?"

Her tone towards this particular member of her staff was largely conditioned by the fact that Lord Medland, the father of Miss Bellairs, was a personal friend of the Comte de Mauby, whose château was being used; and in fact provided most of the funds for its maintenance.

Adela allowed her thick lashes almost to cover her eyes, while she scraped bits of lichen off the balustrade with a tiny stick. "You'll probably think me a mere snob," said she. "Of course the war has made us all levellers. Peeresses are marrying 'bus conductors, and peers munition girls. But I'm old-fashioned, I suppose; and Hector Monkland's my cousin, too. He's heir to a baronetcy, you know."

"And what of Nurse Pennant? She has always struck me as quite well bred."

"Well, I happen to know the place she comes from—I have seen her people."

"And they are—impossible?"

"I believe my aunt, Lady Monkland, thinks so. Oh, Matron, you know what county society is like—still! Old Pennant, nurse's father, was just a farmer's son. One of General Selby's daughters made a runaway match with him. Her family wouldn't see her after the marriage. But General Selby made interest to get his hopeful son-in-law appointed agent to the Warris-

toun estate at Estongarth in Mickleshire. As it happens, the property is in the next dale to Mannadale, where the Monkland place is. The Pennant girls are known all round the neighbourhood for their pushing ways. The mother died young, and the father is dreadful. I am told he gets drunk in Bircastle every market-night."

Mrs. Burke looked serious.

"I don't think my aunt would be pleased to hear that Hector had got caught by one of the Pennant girls——" began Adela.

"But, my dear, if what you say is true, Captain Monkland probably knows all about it——"

"More probably not. You know he has become heir only since poor Lionel was killed in Gallipoli. Before that he was very little at Mannadale; and since, he has had, of course, no chance to become better acquainted with his future property."

"But I suppose," went on Mrs. Burke after a pause, "that Miss Pennant is aware of her social handicap?"

"I should think we may take that for granted——don't you?"

"Well, I am disappointed," owned Matron with a sigh. "He was a difficult patient when he first came, and she has had such a good influence——made him so much nicer to deal with——"

"Oh, but that's Hector's line, you know, getting charming girls to reform him. Did you never hear about Alys Lang? But I'm talking scandalously."

"You do not, I gather, think him likely to make a good husband?"

Adela laughed softly. "The lady is probably more than ready to take her risk. But no; Hector's wife will have no bed of roses. However, now he's heir to the title, perhaps he'll settle down."

"Let us hope so. By the way, did you say that Mr. Pennant is agent to the Warristoun property?"

Adela's lids rose for a moment. "Yes. Do you know them?"

"Only I was wondering if they are the people about whom there was that curious scandal just before the war? A kind of Ardlamont affair."

It seemed that Miss Bellairs winced. "Yes. Those are the people."

"Ah . . . now I am remembering. The elder brother was mysteriously shot; and the younger only just escaped being tried for the murder. In fact, he would have been sent for trial had not his alibi at the inquest proved so entirely convincing."

The silence of the girl beside her made her look quickly round. Adela was holding her nether lip with her teeth and her colour was heightened.

"Have I said anything dreadful?" cried Mrs. Burke.

"Oh, no, of course not. I don't expect you ever knew . . . that I was engaged to Guy Warristoun—the one who was shot?"

"My dear! All my apologies——"

"But why? You could not know—or at least, it was natural you should forget. Oh, Matron, it was a dreadful affair. It ruined my life. It ruined Ranulf Warristoun's, too. He could not get over it. The accusation—the suggestion—of his having had to do with Guy's death, seemed to break him. At least, he disappeared——"

"Disappeared?"

"Altogether. He has never been seen since. Nobody knows if he is alive or dead. And it is said in the Dale that old Pennant, left in sole charge of the property, is feathering his nest finely."

"My dear Miss Bellairs, I fear you are right. This little idyll had better come to nothing."



"I rather supposed you would take that view if you knew more of the circumstances."

"But how had I best cut the knot? I must not scold Miss Pennant. She has done nothing to deserve blame; and experience has taught me that in these cases to give a hint is simply to apply the match to the powder."

"Why, Matron, who could have thought you so wanting in resource? Was not Miss Pennant to go on long leave, and was not her leave stopped when that last huge convoy came in? Let her take it now, immediately. Pack her off to England to-morrow. By the time she returns you will have got rid of Captain Monkland; and the whole thing will come quite naturally to an end."

Below, in the rose-scented arbour, a small French boy, wearing no coat, and having his trousers fastened to his shirt with large buttons, had just brought tea for the captain, and Nurse Pennant was covering the jig-saw preparatory to leaving the patient.

Away at their feet stretched the blue tumbling sea which divides Normandy from England. Faint puffs of smoke on the horizon showed where the watching guard moved tirelessly from point to point. Nearer, as if they could drop a teaspoon into it, was the huddle of the roofs of the tiny *plage*, its Casino raising a snow-white cupola, like the ornament on a cake, adorned with the flags of England, France, Italy, and America.

In the garden, groups of officers with blue bands on their arms talked, laughed, strolled. On the terrace above, the tea-bell sounded, and Miss Bellairs waved her hand to hasten them. They turned admiring faces to her as they came up the steps. For Nurse Pennant's one admirer, the Honourable Adela Bellairs could boast her dozens. But not one of them had precisely



that look in his eyes which Hector Monkland was turning upon the changeful face of the girl beside him.

"I'm worried," said he, "been haunted all to-day with the horrible thought that they're going to board me."

"Horrible? Why, they'll send you to England."

"That's it. I don't want to go."

*"Not want to go to England?"* Oh, now you are talking, as Mr. Jones says, through your hat. Of course you want to go. The bitter part of it will be the coming back. But you needn't think of that yet. You must not cross the bridge before you come to it."

"Penny, you're wrong. Guess again, O Flag of my country."

She laughed. The pleasantries at the expense of her odd name of Pennant were endless among the mischievous boys who thronged the place. Penny was an obvious abbreviation, but since a pennant is something like a flag, and one spends a penny on flag-days in the street, Flag Day was her usual appellation.

She ignored Captain Monkland's exhortation to guess again, and, in order to turn the talk a little, asked, "Where is your home?"

"In the north," said he. "Mannadale. Perhaps you know it? High up in Teesdale."

"Why, that must be near Estondale?"

"Certainly. That's the next dale."

"I—my family—live at Estongarth!"

He looked amazed, incredulous. "But, Flag-Day, how can that be? I should have seen you—or heard your name."

His nurse seldom blushed. In fact, he could not remember ever before having seen the cloud of faint pink (like a carnation, he thought) which now showed upon her fair skin.

"You could never have seen me, for I have never



been there," said she. "I don't even know my own father by sight."

"What are you giving me?"

"It's true." She had collected her things and stood poised in act of flight. He grasped a bit of her gown, flashing a glance around which told him that the summons to tea had cleared off all prying eyes. "You don't stir till I know what you mean."

"It is nothing so very extraordinary. I was adopted—when I was still a baby. I was one of twins. The other was a boy and he—died. My mother had longed for a son, and the loss and disappointment killed her. An aunt of hers was just at that time left a childless widow, and she asked my father to let her have me and look upon me as entirely her own."

"Then you were not brought up in Estondale?"

"Oh, no. Mrs. Rodney, my adopted mother, lived at Bournemouth. She was very good to me, but brought me up quite helpless and dependent. Then she died, rather unexpectedly, and it was found that she had left no will, so I was unprovided for."

"Jove, what a shame! And you got nothing?"

"Nothing at all, except what she had given me when alive—a couple of hundred pounds or so. I didn't like to turn up at home, like the bad Penny you all call me, so I went to London and trained as a nurse. My training was just complete when the war broke out, and I volunteered at once. So, what with one thing and another, I never went home, and only saw my sisters once when they came to London for a week or two. However, as soon as I get my leave, I am going to Estongarth. I have promised that I will."

"Are you likely to get leave?" he demanded eagerly.

"At any minute, I should think. My leave is a long time overdue."

"Then they may board me to-morrow if they like,"



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he chuckled gleefully. "I hope they hoof me out of this at once. What fun it would be if we crossed together, wouldn't it?"

"Not as far as I am concerned, for I am a very bad sailor," said she calmly, the tiny curve at the corners of her lips showing her quite competent to steer the talk out of dangerous channels. "Not to point out to you the further fact that leave people don't cross on hospital ships."

He looked at her with humorous appreciation. If their friendship were to be continued in England, then there was no hurry. The delightful present might be prolonged. . . .

"No sentiment about you, is there?" he murmured; "or if there is, you keep it in the cellar. However, when we get to Estongarth——"

She smiled sedately. This was no pose. It was natural to her to be sedate—the result of her training in the dull, luxurious home of the wealthy widow at Bournemouth. Her very aloofness lent fuel to the young man's fire. She was such a change—such a blessed change—like a cool English shower after months of tropical skies, hard and brazen. It was wonderful what appeal it made to him.

"If they send you off, Penny," he muttered under his breath, "I'll get round the authorities somehow—I can wangle it! We take in a dozen convalescent officers at the Grange, and I'll get sent there to complete my cure—see if I don't! And then we'll make things hum, won't we?"

"Making things hum was never on my list of accomplishments. I keep on telling you so and you won't believe it."

"Because you have changed the whole face of the world for me," he began on a thrilling note, "just by being yourself; that's all—all I ask."

He faltered to a pause as a step sounded along the alley walk.

The little boy in shirt and breeches approached, hurrying on his errand.

"On a besoin de Mademoiselle à la maison," said he; and with a laugh and a glance, Nurse Pennant gathered up her work and fled.



## CHAPTER II

### THE NURSE ON LEAVE

**S**INCE leaving the junction, the train had been climbing steadily; and the hazel eyes of Jacynth Pennant were busy absorbing impressions of her native land.

Not much like the rich, sleepy south of England where her youth had been spent! The deep woods and fine pastures of the Vale of York had now given place to the grim strength of the moors. Through the haze, Mickel Fell heaved his great bare shoulder, and the line of the Scudder Scar cut sharp and precipitously above the deep gorge through which the Esta flowed to its confluence with Tees.

Just before reaching Bircastle-in-le-Dale, which is a terminus, the train crossed a viaduct, and the traveller found herself looking down upon a great stone fortress, whose circular keep crowned a rocky bluff with the turbid rock-strewn river roaring at its feet.

The grandeur of it was like a fitting climax to the gradual change in the landscape from smiling commonplace to fierce uncompromising strength. Just such a barrier should defend the gateway of the moors; and just so should the Tudor bridge fling its steep arches across the stony river bed.

It was all rather dreamlike. Matron's vigilance had prevented anything like a farewell scene between herself and Captain Monkland. Her leave had been arranged in the twinkling of an eye. Within twelve hours

of their talk in the harbour, she had found herself on her way home.

Home! A great deal of doubt and some anxiety clouded the prospect for her. She had never ventured to own to herself that her brief introduction to her two sisters had left her far lonelier than she had felt when they were still unknown. Two shadowy sisters somewhere awaiting her with welcome and affection would have been a more comforting vision than her memories of the two brisk young women—"resolutely stylish," as Mrs. Walford described one of her characters—whom she had once visited in a hotel in Bloomsbury. She was telling herself now that they were probably far nicer than her remembrance of them. Her bringing-up had been so restricted, Mrs. Rodney's circle so carefully chosen, that any new type would of course seem strange to her. Now her experience had widened. She could meet them with more sympathy. She knew, for her adopted mother had told her, that her own mother had married beneath her. The unknown father might prove to be a greater shock than the two sisters had been. She wished the meeting over, even as the train entered the station and she came to the carriage window to see if there were anybody there who looked like her kith and kin.

There was nobody. The platform was, as far as she could tell, empty of all but two decrepit-looking porters. She guessed that her telegram had not been delivered; but as she stood looking rather forlornly about her, she saw someone making signals from behind the ticket barrier; and realised that the exigencies of war demand that the public be excluded from platforms.

She recognised the man who was trying to attract her attention, from the photo of him which she possessed. He was big, heavy, and had certainly once

been handsome. His face was now too florid, his form too unwieldy; but he kept his curly hair and the flashing eyes which had won the heart of the General's daughter thirty years ago.

She was so glad to see him that her spirits rose with a bound. As she waved her hand to him she flushed most becomingly, hastened through the barrier, and was at once caught in his arms, and kissed, warmly—even hungrily. It surprised her to find that he was so moved as not to be able to speak at once. His eyes had tears in them, and he held her tightly until he was able to say, in a choked voice:

"You're so d——d like your mother."

The oath could not shock Jacynth, after her years of hospital experience. The information conveyed along with it was the interesting thing.

"Am I? Am I really like her?" she cried, beaming up at him; and he had to turn away his face a moment to hide the working of his mouth.

"The only one," he said huskily at last. "I hoped for it, but never expected it to be so marked. When first you caught sight of me and your face lit up—God! It brings it all back!" He took her arm, squeezing it affectionately in his great fist. "Doss and Margie are both like me," he went on. "Like as two peas in a pod. Showy. A bit coarse. You've got just her thoroughbred look, bless your heart. You might have been her when you smiled like that. Well, I'm glad I've got you safe. No car, of course, but here's a pretty bit of horseflesh that'll carry us home best pace. There's a cart for your luggage."

She laughed gaily. "It won't take much to carry that! I've only brought a suit-case. I must buy some clothes here if I am to go about in mufti. You know they owe me two leaves really, and Matron thinks she can manage to let me stay a month! Think of that!"



He laughed ironically. "Generous, ain't it, when you've served close on four years? When's this devilish war going to end—eh?"

"They say out there that it is almost over," she sighed. "That the Huns are pretty well done for. But it doesn't seem so to me. I feel as if it would go on for ever and ever. I feel too as if, ever since I could remember, it had been war, everlastingly war."

He uttered a sympathetic grunt. "Well, you'll be as well off here as in most places. We grow our own meat, poultry, eggs, butter and milk, as well as our own fruit and vegetables. My little girl won't be rationed while she's on leave! Trust your old dad for that!"

As he spoke, they had been descending a hill whose steepness made Jacynth grasp the side of her seat, but of whose existence neither horse nor driver seemed to be aware. It ended in a sharp right angle, where the extremely narrow road was closely flanked with great stone factories, built upon the very rock of the river bed. Before the shock of negotiating this corner was over, the traveller found herself whisked round sharp to the left, over the camel-like hump of the old bridge, and then driven sharply along another narrow lane, called Briggate, whence they emerged into the main street of Bircastle, almost at the foot of a precipitous ascent, or cobbled precipice, locally known as "Bank."

Everyone in the market-place—which they reached after crawling up this height "like a fly on a church spire," thought Jacynth—seemed to know Mr. Penant, and presently he pulled up, in response to a hearty salutation from a comfortable farmer and his wife in an old-fashioned gig.

Mr. and Mrs. Safford were deeply interested in his youngest daughter, and the girl responded cordially to their kindness, leaning over to shake hands with the little woman like a withered pippin, whose shrewd eyes

gazed upon her so kindly, and who declared her to be "the raight image of her moother."

When they had driven on, the smile of delight which this testimony had brought to Joseph Pennant's heavy face faded, and he remarked:

"Dash it all, Jass, we mustn't let on to Doss and Margie that I introduced you to that old couple! Not on my daughters' visiting list, not by a long way!"

"Oh? But they seem delightful old people. What's wrong with them?"

"Wrong? Oh, nothing. They're as right as rain. But of course it won't do to be chummy with them if it's the county we're laying for."

"Are we laying for the county? And what does that mean exactly?" asked Jass drily: and his reply was:

"If it mightn't be your mother herself speaking! She was fond of Mrs. Safford, she was."

Having left the town they drove up Estondale by the loveliest of roads. Estongarth was a charming village, grouped about a green, and with a pretty little lake in the background. The dogcart pulled up before a low house, pleasantly situated in a sheltered garden—comfortable and unpretentious—just what Jacynth liked and had hardly hoped to find.

"This is Free Croft—your home, my maid," said Joe Pennant tenderly; and his voice, charged with emotion, appealed to his daughter in a way she had not foreseen. She became aware that, far as he was from her ideals of what a man should be, she was going to love her father.

They had hardly drawn up at the gate before Doss and Margie came running to meet their sister. Doris at this time was nearly thirty, and Marjorie eight-and-twenty. They were, alas! exactly what her memory had told her to expect. But she choked down all such thoughts in her gratitude to them for the warmth of

their welcome, concerning which there seemed to be no question.

They eagerly invited her upstairs to take possession of her own room, which they had had newly papered and furnished for her, so that "when the war was over" she might come and take permanent possession of it. The style of decoration was not what Jacynth would have chosen, but it was gay and clean and smelt of roses. The sun streamed in at the window, and the view comprised the lake, with the distant giants of the Dale beyond it. She felt deeply touched at their kindness, as she stood at the casement, gazing out, and hearkening to the distant voice of the river.

"This was dad's idea, having all this done," observed Doris, gazing about her with satisfaction. "It's been quite a good thing for him—taken him out of himself, you know—given him something to think about. We do hope you'll be patient with him, Jass?"

There was a look of entreaty in the faces of both sisters. They came and ranged themselves one on either side of her, and something in their manner struck her with foreboding. "Patient with him? Why, what does he do?" she cried, expecting to be told either that he ate cheese with his knife, or was hail-fellow-well-met with those who were not "county." The reply was so much more serious that she received a shock.

"We wondered whether to tell you or not," said Doris slowly, "but we have decided it would be worse for you to hear from somebody else, as no doubt you would. He—well—he takes a drop too much now and again, you know."

The horror in Jacynth's eyes constrained Marjorie to add, "He never used to. But it's growing on him. He gets worse and worse."

Jacynth faced the tidings with what courage she *might*. "You were right to tell me. I ought to be able

to fight this thing—more especially as it is of recent growth."

"Yes, that's what we thought! We said to ourselves, 'Jass being a nurse, and all——'"

"But give me details. The—the extent of it. That's what I've got to know. Do I understand you to say that it—it is known about him? Has he been publicly seen the worse for drink?"

There was a little silence. "Twice," said Dossie at last. "Twice he's been brought home at night."

Jass made a little sound of consternation. She was ashamed of her own thought—her intense humiliation at the news of this crowning disability. Hector Monkland had better not come to Mannadale. There could be nothing for her but pain.

"Oh, we must stop it," said she miserably; "surely I can help him—we must fight it somehow. Do you know what made him take to it first?"

They shook their heads. "It must be about a year now since we first noticed it."

"Is it the worry of the war, do you think? Has he any business troubles?"

"Law, no," said Doss scornfully. "He does just as he likes with the property, and we're very well off. As Mrs. Grice often says, a man might do worse than one of us three, as far as money goes."

"It's just his bringing-up," cut in Margie. "You see, he didn't belong to poor ma's class. Mrs. Grice says what's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh."

"That's nonsense—there's quite as much drunkenness among the upper classes," cried Jacynth quickly. "Who's Mrs. Grice?"

"Our doctor's wife. She's young and go-ahead. Oh, *this Dale has been a different place since she came*

and the convalescent officers have been about!" cried Doss joyously. "She's rather intimate with us."

"She must be!—to dare to say a thing like that to you—of your own father."

Doss grew rather red. "I oughtn't to repeat it, perhaps," said she uncomfortably, "but you see, there's no hiding a thing like that. Four men brought him back last time; so of course, since then, everybody knows, all up and down the Dale."

"Don't take it too hard," said Margie, who had watched her younger sister's perturbation with a suggestion of cynicism. "After all, you haven't had to struggle all your life, as we have, against this half-and-half business—belonging to the county on one side and not on the other. I can tell you it's no catch. I'd have liked to go away as you did, when war broke out, and make my way among people who didn't know. But in some ways it seemed a pity to give up the ground we've gained. I tell you, just before the war we were asked pretty nearly everywhere, except Lady Monkland and one or two stiff old cats like her . . . and then pa must needs start dragging us down with this disgusting habit of his."

Jacynth had subsided upon the chintz cushions of her window seat and was gazing out upon the landscape with tear-glazed eyes. Doss came and sat by her, putting a strong arm round her little shoulders in silent sympathy. "That's where the Monklands live—the Grange—that you see the chimneys of, among those trees. They've got such a good-looking set of chaps up there just now—convalescent officers, you know. We are always meeting them about, at other houses. Nice for us, to have them know that her ladyship doesn't ask us up there, isn't it? They are most of them chummy with the Grices, and we meet them there constantly. One—Mr. Pearson—is the funniest fellow

you ever knew. He comes here a good deal. Oh, it's a bit galling, I tell you. Her ladyship used to call on ma, you know, in old times."

"It isn't their property that father manages, is it?"

"Oh no, that's Estongarth Place. You can't see that from here. It's beyond the corner of the lake, as it were. Hospital for Tommies now. We go there pretty well every day. Doss helps in the linen room, and I teach the boys to make Smyrna rugs and so on."

"Who are the owners?" asked Jacynth absently.

The girls stared in a surprise which was at first too deep for words.

"Don't you know? Really, honestly, Jass?"

"Wait a little. The name's Warristoun, isn't it?"

"But haven't you heard about Warristoun's disappearance? And that nobody knows at this moment whether he's alive or dead?"

## CHAPTER III

### SOME SECRETS OF THE DALE

THE tea bell rang.

"Come along down and we'll tell you the whole story," cried Margie, giving both hands to pull Jass from her seat. "Just fancy your never having heard about it, with every newspaper in England full of it."

"Well," said Jacynth as they went down, "I believe I remember vaguely hearing that something dreadful happened—seeing the name of Estongarth in all the papers. But it was while I was in hospital, training, and I used to be too tired to look at papers. Besides, at that time I only knew your names—it was like hearing about strangers, to me."

They entered the smart drawing-room, filled from end to end with cheap silver photo frames and trumpery of all kinds. There was an up-to-date looking parlour-maid who brought in tea, and the variety of luxurious cakes rather shocked Jacynth. Her sisters, however, declared that after her long term of foreign service she must not be stinted. They placed her on the sofa and plied her with dainties.

"Pa has to go up to a board meeting, so he won't be in to tea," remarked Doss. "We can be comfortable together."

"I can't understand about Mr. Warristoun," said Jass. "How does father get his salary and so on?"

"Oh, before he went off, he left some kind of power with pa. Do they call it a power of attorney? Any-

how I know the effect of it is to make him pretty well his own master. But of course it's often difficult: when they came and asked for the Place to be used as a hospital, for instance. Pa didn't know what he ought to do about it. But he thought it would be unpatriotic to decline; and they've had it two years now."

"We gave them a fine treat last Christmas," said Doss with satisfaction. "A real old beano! I told pa that we stand now as you might say in Warristoun's place, and that we must do something. We think of getting up a play this Christmas, if the officers at Mannadale then are as nice a set as they are now. But that's the worst of these convalescent places—always changing! We may get in a proper starchy crew next time. I hear old mother Monkland is petitioning to be allowed to keep it for the Guards only."

"Well, her own nephew is in the Guards,"—the words rose to the tip of Jass's tongue, but they were not uttered. Unless or until she ascertained that Hector Monkland would not be deterred by his aunt's attitude from coming to see her, she determined not to mention her acquaintance with him.

"Pearson says if we do get up anything, he'll come, dead or alive," put in Margie rather consciously. "He could stay with the Grices, of course."

"He is such a lark," giggled Dossie; "what do you think he said about old Lady Monkland? Oh, but you don't know her by sight, you wouldn't see how funny it was."

For several minutes she was treated to samples of Mr. Pearson's wit, and made an honest effort to be interested in a man who evidently interested her sisters deeply.

"He's seen the ghost, too," continued Margie.

"What ghost?" duly inquired the audience.

"Why, the ghost at the Grange. The Blue Lady of



Mannadale. She walks along the corridor, and has never been seen except by somebody standing near the head of the great staircase. She carries two swords in her hand. They say she was on her way to give them to the two men who fought for her. They did fight. She had promised to marry the victor; but after the fight the man who had killed his friend turned his dripping blade on her and ran her through."

"What a story! A regular out-and-outer," said Jass mischievously. "And you say Mr. Pearson has seen her?"

"So he declares. Seriously, Jass, he thinks he did. She rushed past him, just as he was gaining the top of the stairs, so close that she almost seemed to touch him. He was coming up slowly, being still very shaky from his wound, and he said if he had not had a good grip on the banisters he thinks he would have slipped. He thought it was one of the other men dressed up, or else a nurse gone mad, and he said, 'Here, not so much of your offensive, or I shall be thrown downstairs.' He had hardly spoken before he realised that nobody was there. He could see right along the corridor, both ways, and there was not a sign of any moving thing. He says it gave him the creeps."

"Of course they say that that was what happened to poor Miss Lang," said Doss, in an explanatory way.

"Miss Lang? Who was she?"

"Just fancy! You have never heard a syllable of the Dale gossip! Why, that happened quite a few years ago. Miss Lang was a girl staying in the house. In fact, she was engaged to Hector Monkland, the nephew who will succeed to the title now that poor Lionel is dead."

These words, as may be supposed, kindled a new interest in Jacynth.

"Did an accident happen to her?" she asked rather breathlessly.

"She was killed, my dear, as is supposed, by falling down those stairs—at least, she was found lying at the foot of them."

"Why, how dreadful! Does nobody know how it happened?"

"No. That is the extraordinary part of it. A housemaid found her, in the early morning, lying head downwards at the bottom of the stairs, with her candlestick clutched in her hand."

A hundred questions rushed to Jacynth's lips, but she did not dare display too openly the interest suddenly grown so keen. She asked if Captain Monkland had been in the house at the time.

"You mean the cousin, her *fiancé*? Yes, he was there, and Lionel also. In fact, the house was packed with visitors for the shooting. You may think how awful it was for this poor Hector Monkland. He was like a madman, they say, and was too ill to go to the inquest; the doctor thought he would have brain fever, and his deposition had to be taken down. He was unable to suggest any theory as to how such a thing could have happened."

"People said at the time that the Monklands tried to hush up inquiry," remarked Doss. "Said there was something behind that never came out. But that sort of thing is usually whispered, isn't it? My own belief is that she saw the ghost."

"Could nobody suggest how Miss Lang came to be where she was found?"

"No. Nobody saw her after she went to her room that night. The last person to go upstairs was Parish, the butler, who had been at Mannadale for years. He sleeps downstairs, but it is part of his duty to make the round of the house last thing, after everybody has come

in and gone upstairs. That was the night of Brough Hill Fair, which is always on the thirtieth of September. All the men in the Dale go to it, and all the gentlemen of the house party had been from the Grange. That made them very late, of course; and it was nearly two o'clock in the morning before Parish finished his round. He found everything as usual, walked down the main staircase, and so to bed. The housemaid discovered the body at a little after six the next morning."

"What was Miss Lang wearing when she was found?" asked Jacynth, after some pondering.

"Ah, this was the curious part of it. She was completely dressed, except for her evening gown, which she had exchanged for a silk wrapper of some kind. With that exception she was exactly as she had sat down to dinner that evening, even to the jewelled fillet in her hair, and the necklace round her neck. Now, if she had come out of her room to go to the bath, she would have been in her night things, one would think. Moreover, the bathrooms are in quite a different part of the house, there would have been no reason at all for her to go anywhere near the main staircase. It was suggested by Lady Monkland that she might have been on her way downstairs to fetch a book: and a novel she was known to have been reading was, as a fact, found downstairs in the ladies' morning-room. I ought to tell you that the Grange is not by any means the sort of house where people run about the passages at night. It is very prunes-prism; and besides, Alys Lang was what you would call a particularly *nice* girl — almost too proper, in fact. A bit dull."

"Could her maid make any suggestion as to why she had not undressed and gone to bed?"

"No; because for three nights her maid had not

waited up to put her to bed. The girl had been ill, and Miss Lang would not let her sit up."

"And that," said Jacynth thoughtfully, "is the one little circumstance which looks suspicious, doesn't it?"

Her frank interest in the story pleased and encouraged her sisters. They enlarged upon the shadow which had fallen upon the Grange since the dreadful event.

"Everyone," they said, "was so sorry for poor Hector. I don't believe that he—Hector, I mean—has ever been to the Grange since."

Jass was silent. She knew well, from what he had told her, that he had not set foot in Mannadale for some years. She began to reflect upon how little she knew of this man, who had come to mean so much to her. His usual demeanour was certainly not such as to suggest a tragic past. She remembered that Miss Bellairs had once hinted at something of the kind to her. But she had taken no notice, because Miss Bellairs had a way of dropping little poisoned arrows about.

"What seems odd," said she, after thought, "is that apparently such a long time elapsed between Miss Lang's retiring for the night, and going downstairs in search of her book. If she was not gossiping in some other girl's room, what was she doing all the time, since she had not got ready for bed? Writing letters, perhaps?"

"Well, as far as could be ascertained, she wasn't doing that. At least, no letters could be found. Everyone declared that there had been no kind of quarrel between her and Hector. She was just as usual when she went to bed, though one or two of the girls who were witnesses said she seemed a little out of spirits. They thought it was because Hector was out."

"I suppose it never occurred to anybody as possible that she may have gone to that precise spot for the purpose of seeing the ghost, if she could?"

"Well, you know, that was suggested by some of the evidence; it's funny we should be having all this over-to-day, because we were talking about it at the Grices' yesterday. You see, Pearson's declaring he had seen the ghost brought it all back to our minds. The vicar's wife had kept the newspaper reports of the inquest, and she looked it up, and we found that one of the house party—I think it was a Miss Bellairs—said they had been daring one another to go and stand for ten minutes by the hall clock at the top of the staircase alone after midnight. She had to own, though, that Alys Lang had said nothing would induce her to make the venture."

"I think," put in Margie, "that it was because Lady Monkland was so angry at this that people began to think there was something she was anxious to hush up. She cannot bear to have the haunting mentioned. You can understand that—it makes it difficult to keep maids, you see. It is never spoken of at the Grange."

"They said," Doss continued in corroboration, "that when Miss Lang was picked up there was a look of horror on her dead face. The servants said her eyes were fixed as if they saw something dreadful. Oh, I shall always maintain that she saw it, right enough!"

"Did the fall actually kill her?"

"Broke her neck. The doctors thought she must have been running, or hastening very much. A bit of the lace at the bottom of her robe in front was torn, as if she had stepped upon it; and they said the position in which she was found looked as if she had fallen head over heels."

"What makes it all the more curious,"—Margie again took up the narration—"is that both the young Warristouns were in the house that night—sleeping there after the Fair; and it wasn't more than a couple of months later that another inquest was held, on poor

Guy, and we all thought Ranulf would be tried for the murder."

"Tried for murder! *For murdering his brother!* Is that the man who employs father?"

"Yes. Of course in those days Mr. Warristoun, their father, was alive. He was a very wicked old man, if all tales are to be believed."

"Estongarth," said Jass drily, "seems to be a lurid kind of a place to live in."

Doss giggled. "It got quite celebrated," she remarked with obvious pride. "Mrs. Grice always says it was her bad luck that Bob—that's her husband—bought the practice just the quarter afterwards, so that she never saw any of the Warristouns, nor Hector Monkland. She says she looked forward no end to coming to live in a place where things like that had actually happened!"

"Morbid curiosity constrains me to go on asking questions," said Jass, before whose vision a very complete picture of Mrs. Grice's mentality was beginning to arise. "Why should Mr. Warristoun have been accused of murdering his brother?"

Doss nodded her head wisely. "That, my dear, was all the doing of a certain Miss Bellairs. She's a society beauty—I wish you could see her, Jass——"

"Are you talking about Adela Bellairs, Lord Medland's daughter?" asked Jass coolly.

"Oh, Jass, do you know her?"

"Rather well, in a way. She was one of the V.A.Ds. under me at Mauby."

"I say!" One girl looked eagerly at another. "That'll be something to tell Mrs. Grice!"

"She was engaged to Guy, the elder brother," began Margie, but Doss broke in:

"Yes, but the point of the whole story is that she was first engaged to Ranulf, the younger! Oh, those

brothers were different! Guy was so gay and so handsome, everybody was in love with him, and Ranulf was ugly and cross-grained and bad-tempered like his father. Their mother died when they were both young, and it is said that the old man loved Guy and was unkind to Ranulf. Well, while Ranulf was still at Oxford and Guy was away—in the Guards, I think he was—Adela came to stay at Mannadale and Ranulf fell head over ears in love with her, and to everybody's surprise she accepted him. Well, then, you see, Guy came home. He was not only better-looking, and much better fun, but also he was the heir. The long and short of it is that the lady transferred her affections."

Jacynth, listening, thought she could well believe it.

"Ranulf," went on Doss, "went rampaging off in a wild rage, and is said to have made vague threats. But in a few weeks' time he thought better of it, and returned home. Guy and he were to all appearance reconciled; and one morning they went off together to shoot hares in Gatesgarth Wood. Ranulf returned home alone, about two o'clock. It appeared that, on their way out that morning, a farmer who lives near here—old Mr. Safford—met them. He told Ranulf that a certain colt was for sale in the market that morning. Ranulf was particularly anxious to buy this colt, as he had an idea of starting a stud farm up on the moor. He therefore left Guy to go shooting alone, and walked all the way down to Bircastle with old Safford. He was lucky enough to secure the colt, and he then took the old man to lunch at the Duke's Head. Up to the moment when the two parted, in the Market Place, there were of course plenty of people to witness as to his doings. After that time there was only his own account, and the evidence of one of the Warristouns' own keepers, a man called Joyce. Ranulf's statement was that he walked straight from Bircastle up

to the wood, which he entered by what is known as Cony's Gate. He walked all through without seeing Guy or hearing him shoot. Concluding that sport had been bad, and that Guy must have given up and gone home, he determined to do the same. He came out by a stile at the further end, and, meeting Joyce just outside, asked if he had seen Captain Warristoun. The man said no, but he had heard him shoot, once, about an hour and a half earlier. He remembered the exact time, because he looked at his watch. He had been busy ever since, at the same spot, examining snares, and had seen nobody. If Joyce's evidence was trustworthy, the alibi was convincing; for old Safford knew the time Ranulf left Bircastle, and it was not five minutes before Joyce said he heard the shot. But I think, at the first inquiry, the coroner had just a suspicion that the keeper might be lying to save his master. The fact of Ranulf's jealousy of his brother came out, unfortunately, and, so far as was known, nobody else had any cause for desiring Guy's death, and nobody else had been seen in or near the wood. There was a remand, however, and when the inquiry was reopened Ranulf's counsel had obtained valuable new evidence. A man—I think he was one of the Mannadale grooms—certainly a man-servant of some kind from the Grange—came forward to say he had walked from Bircastle all the way behind Mr. Ranulf Warristoun, and that he had actually seen him go into the wood, as he said, at Cony's Gate, at exactly the time he asserted that he had done so."

"And that proved his innocence?"

"Yes. There would not have been time, even if he had run all the way as hard as he could, for him to get to the spot where the body was found, and out of the wood to the place where he met Joyce. Joyce said that the young man came over the stile quite leisurely



and unconcerned, even before he saw him there; and after asking if his brother had passed by, went on to talk of the colt he had just purchased: and the other man, who saw him go into the wood, said also that he was not hurrying in the least. Besides—if the two brothers had met, and a quarrel had taken place, he would have used his own gun to shoot with—not Guy's—wouldn't he?"

"One would think so."

"But Guy had been shot with his own gun. They didn't find his body till late that evening. He was sitting by a tree, as if he had been eating his lunch, and apparently someone crept up behind, hit him with something which stunned him, then took his own gun and shot him while he was unconscious. The curious part of it was that he had not been robbed. I suppose that was what made people so suspicious of Ranulf. The gossips and rumours which flew about were perfectly horrible! However, he was honourably acquitted, and the coroner shook hands and congratulated him."

"Pa said," remarked Margie, "that if Ranulf had been brought to trial, all sorts of things would have come to light. He knew, because he had to break the news to old Mr. Warristoun, for Ranulf quite declined to do so. Pa says that the squire received the news without blinking an eyelid, and remarked in a surprised voice: 'So they actually meant it!' Then, without a word of warning, he slipped sideways in his chair, with his face all pulled down on one side. He had had a stroke, and after that he was never able to speak again, though he did not die till the following spring."

"So he could not give any evidence?"

"No. They could not make him understand anything. He died in March, and his son shut up the house

and went off to that estate they have in some outlandish part of France—Brittany, I think they call it.”

“Have the Warristouns estates in France?”

“Yes. He was there when war was declared, and a good many think he enlisted in the French army. Anyhow, he disappeared, and from that day to this nobody has ever heard a word of him. The Government won’t allow death to be presumed yet, but we haven’t much doubt. He’s the last of the Wild Warristouns.”

“A good thing too, judging by all I have heard of them,” remarked Jass drily.

“I should think,” mused Doss, “that when the war is over they will take it for granted that folks who don’t turn up must be dead, shouldn’t you?”

“Oh,” cried Margie impatiently, “leave off talking this dismal stuff, and give your minds to something important—what Jass is going to wear!”



## CHAPTER IV

### LADY MONKLAND CONDESCENDS

IT was somewhat surprising to Jacynth to see her two sisters come downstairs to dinner that evening much *décolletées* and with hair elaborately dressed, while her father appeared in dinner jacket and stiff shirtfront. The dinner was handed in courses, and carved on the sideboard. The clothless table seemed less a concession to war conditions than a following of fashion; and there was so much to eat that she felt ashamed.

After dinner Joe Pennant sat and yawned in the drawing-room, bored to death. His youngest daughter began to suspect that her sisters might be in part responsible for his lately acquired bad habits. It was absurd to require that a man of his temperament should sit idle in a drawing-room in clothes which he hated all the evening long, in case an officer from Mannadale might call.

She did what she could for him. He asked for music, and it so chanced that she could give him exactly what he wanted. Her modest little talent had been much in request at Mauby, and her repertoire consisted exclusively of topical songs from the musical comedy of the day—just what Pennant could appreciate! As the little girl, so like her mother, sat there in the twilight, the gold of candlelight upon her delicate face, singing

"The key of my heart is the key to the gate  
Of a Paradise for twol"



his whole being melted in a gush of purely British sentiment.

When they separated for the night, he slipped into her hand a cheque of which the amount surprised her. "To rig yourself out," he muttered. "God bless you, little woman. Don't despise your old dad, will you?"

Her arms came up and clung to his neck, strangle-tight. "Oh, dad, she loved you so much! Better than anything else in the world—gave it all up for you, just you! And because she loved you so, you have me to love you . . . *love you*. . . . We've got to be worthy of her, haven't we, dear?"

As he returned her caress with a vehemence almost terrifying, he groaned aloud.

Creeping up to bed with smarting eyes, she vowed to do all in her power to help him to make his path of recovery easy.

She would have liked to spend her first day at home wandering round the village, making acquaintance with the haunts in which her mother's short life had been spent. But her sisters decreed otherwise. It was imperative that they should have a long day's shopping in Darlington, and make Jacynth "fit to be seen."

Pennant drove them down to Bircastle, and picked them up at the station on their return. Doss and Margie were apparently surprised to see him, and they remarked later on with satisfaction that he was pulling himself together now Jass had come, but that they feared it would soon wear off. Next night would be market night, and that was the danger point.

Jacynth racked her brains for an excuse to bring him home punctually; and to her joy she made, in course of the evening, the discovery that he liked a game of cribbage. She had been accustomed to play this not only with Mrs. Rodney, but with some of the patients

at Mauby. They had some exciting games, and she challenged him forthwith for the following evening. He looked doubtful and remarked that he was apt to be detained on a market night.

"Oh, nonsense," said the girl coolly. "You can easily get home by seven o'clock. Of course Doss doesn't expect you to dress on market nights, do you, Doss?"

Thus pointedly appealed to, Doss rather reluctantly said that she supposed it was rather difficult for him to be in early enough: and he looked distinctly relieved at this indulgence.

"However, you needn't worry," said Margie the following day. "He won't turn up."

He did, however. Punctually at seven he walked into the drawing-room, not in evening clothes, but well brushed and evidently quite sober.

Jacynth and he were enjoying their cribbage afterwards like a couple of babies when Mr. Pearson arrived to call, accompanied by a couple of other young officers, all from the Grange. They were soon followed by Mrs. Grice, and it amused Jacynth to reflect that Doss and Margie had forbidden this lady to make her appearance until they had provided an evening frock for their sister. Mrs. Grice was prepared to be very *empresée*, but Jacynth found nothing in common with her. She was just what she had expected, a common, pushing little woman, who rode to hounds once a week in the season, smoked, made bets, and otherwise modelled herself upon what she supposed to be the smart set.

Both this lady and the officers were disappointed in Jacynth.

"All nurses are alike," she remarked later in confidence to the two elder sisters. "You know—that air of not daring to open your mouth for fear of getting a snub—of being afraid all the time that matron's



round the corner. Oh, I know the uniform's becoming and shouldn't wonder if your sister looks better in it than she does in mufti. Yes, several girls I know have done well, and hooked quite a good match—Nurse-itis they call it, you know. Some of the boys get it badly; but I don't think your Jacynth is the one to take advantage of her opportunities. None of our fellows are much taken with her so far; though she's a rattling accompanist, isn't she? And very good-tempered about it! Ready to oblige, I mean. Yes, my dears, on the whole, I think you may thank your stars. She's a well-meaning little thing, and she's not going to put your noses out of joint one bit!"

Jacynth's long professional acquaintance with officers caused her to receive their advances with a composure which the other Miss Pennants found hard to understand. When they made close and eager inquiry after the guests had departed as to what she thought of them, how she liked Moffat's funny nose, or Captain Gurdon's fine moustache, and above all for a candid opinion of Pearson's wit—her replies, though she strove to make them cordial, rather suggested that the gentlemen who had presented themselves that evening bored her. In fact, she would far rather have been left to play out her cribbage with her father. There was only one officer whose name could make her heart beat faster.

It was not long before she heard it.

A few days later, Pennant came in to lunch in high spirits.

"Ha, Jass," said he, "I've a bone to pick with you, young woman! There's a friend of yours come to town! Three guesses, eh?"

She could not keep the soft pink from her cheeks, and the fact that she felt the inquisitive glances of Doss

and Margie fixed upon her face heightened her blush. "Who is it?" she asked, as quietly as she could.

"A young gentleman who was your patient in France."

"Captain Monkland," said the girl, cutting him short.

"Captain Monkland!" chorused the girls. "Oh, Jass! You know him and you never said a word! Not even when we were talking of his being engaged to Alys Lang and all that!"

"I'm sorry," said Jacynth, "but I had my reasons. You had been telling me that Lady Monkland does not call on you, nor ask you to Mannadale; and I thought I would not even mention having met her nephew until I found out whether he meant to cut us too."

"Cut you? Not much fear of that," chuckled her father in high glee. "'Will you please tell Miss Pen-nant that I am bringing my aunt to call upon her to-morrow afternoon?' says he. 'Oh, I'll tell her right enough,' says I, 'but I must beg leave to confess, captain, that I did not know that you and she were acquainted.' 'Didn't you, though!' says my gentleman, getting red; 'why, she nursed me at Mauby, and under her care my wound that had been bothering me for months closed up in a few weeks.'"

Jacynth darted an apprehensive glance at the two girls, whose excitement was disagreeably obvious.

"So this was the reason why she didn't seem so keen upon the other poor boys," laughed Doss. "Ah, young woman, you're a bit deeper than we thought, you are!"

Jacynth had a momentary impulse to make some kind of appeal to their delicacy of feeling—to beg them to let this matter rest—to plead for silence and forbearance. An instant's reflection, however, was enough to convince her that such a course would make matters



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far worse. All she could do was to make no kind of admission, and by her own composure do what little she could to restrain their eager raillery.

In this she succeeded better than she expected; for the thought of a visit from her ladyship was a sobering idea to both sisters.

They were both sure that Mrs. Grice had summed up their younger sister accurately. She was not a "man's girl." But she had been professionally associated with Captain Monkland, and through that happy accident they were to be given this heaven-sent chance of achieving their great ambition, and establishing themselves on terms with the Grange.

"When once she gets into this house," said one to the other exultingly, "her ladyship will see what a mistake she has been making all this time. She'll find everything here as good style as it is at Mannadale, if we are to judge by what Pearson says."

Short as was the interval between the reception of Captain Monkland's message and Lady Monkland's visit, it yet was long enough for Mrs. Grice to have been duly informed of the impending event.

Doss and Margie put themselves and their drawing-room in gala array. When the doctor's wife arrived, bringing with her one Captain Gurdon who was staying in her house, Jacynth's heart sank. She knew that their appearance was not accidental.

"Goodness, Jass," said Margie in an undertone when the girl came into the drawing-room in a plain white linen skirt and embroidered lawn blouse, "aren't you going to put on anything more effective than that?"

"Why should I?" asked Jacynth in surprise; and, having greeted Mrs. Grice and Captain Gurdon, she went out into the garden with a book and a sunshade.

Margie, upon this, challenged Captain Gurdon to a



single at tennis; and Doss remained in state in the drawing-room talking to the doctor's wife.

Lady Monkland and her nephew arrived at half-past three, her ladyship, although she saw that a call was necessary, in view of the services rendered to Hector by his nurse, being anxious to avoid the hospitality of Free Croft.

In this, however, she was unsuccessful, for Doss had ordered tea to appear "directly her ladyship arrives, no matter what time."

Lady Monkland showed herself more ill-bred than her hostess by declining it; and followed her nephew out into the garden, where Jacynth sat in the shade.

The mistress of the Grange was a well-intentioned woman, though a very narrow-minded one. Her conscience had sometimes smitten her when she reflected that she had most ungraciously dropped "poor Margaret Selby's girls," because they were "all mixed up in the town set." Since the war, she had found herself mixed up, past extrication, with this set. Mrs. Grice, for instance, being foremost in many charitable schemes, had to be fairly often at the Grange; and there was some shame mixed with the reluctance of Hector's aunt to make this uncomfortable call upon those whom she had slighted so long for so inadequate a cause.

The warmth of the welcome she received made her feel worse. But when she was introduced to Jacynth, her whole attitude of mind changed insensibly. The girl's likeness to her mother was evident enough to cause immediate comment. Her unlikeness to her sisters in type was extraordinary. The visitor's manner thawed perceptibly as she said that she felt quite eager to thank her nephew's kind nurse personally for all she had done for him. Jacynth received these thanks just as she should. She was not stand-offish, but neither

was she at all over-cordial. Something in her calm bearing, both towards herself and towards the openly devoted Hector, made Lady Monkland feel small.

She asked if Miss Pennant played tennis, and invited her to come over for a game on the following Thursday.

When she took leave, Hector stayed on. He had tea with the whole party, and, as they said afterwards, with satisfaction, gave himself no airs at all. In fact, he was thinking how much less black was the Pennant family than Adela had painted them. Mrs. Grice had her keen eyes fixed upon him all the time, and after his departure she said to Doss:

"Mark my words, it's a case of Nurse-itis all right with that man. He means to ask your little sister to marry him. I'm never wrong, in these cases. Queer, the taste men have. But you know, there *is* a something about her that one feels by degrees, as it were. She has a personality."

Doss and Margie always believed everything that Mrs. Grice said; but they found it hard to accept this latest pronouncement. They both had a feeling that, if Jacynth had made an impression, either of themselves was bound to make a far deeper one.

"Well, he's promised to come to an evening of games and music next week," said Doss with profound complacency. "The old cat has invited Jass without us—I suppose because Jass nursed the captain—but anyway, the thing's done. She's called. We've got our foot in at the Grange."

"Shall I come over and call for you on Thursday?" asked Hector of Jacynth as he said good-bye.

"Oh no, please don't trouble. My father will drive me over, and then he can pay his respects to Lady Monkland."

"All right; but tell him not to come and fetch you."



I'll bring you back. I have a thousand and one things to say to you. It was much harder than I expected to wangle this thing—my getting home, I mean. I firmly believe that cat Adela put up old Medland to oppose my application."

"Oh? Why should she do that?" inquired Jacynth in genuine surprise.

"Little Flag-Day, you are as clear as running water! And you are adorable in that white frock. I used to think the little red cross on your forehead was perfect, but it's jolly to see your hair. What a lot you have!"

Margie came running up at the moment, and he took his leave.



## CHAPTER V

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER

THE girls said that Jacynth's home-coming had made a different creature of Joseph Pennant. He was like one who shakes off some brooding influence or haunting anxiety. His whole being seemed to relax in the warmth and comfort which his young daughter's affection brought him.

Jacynth and he drove together all over the Warristoun property. It included a large grouse moor, of the wildest and most romantic type; and the savage grandeur of the scenery made strong appeal to the vivid imagination which lay concealed under the demure white brow of Margaret Pennant's daughter.

One day the agent took her further afield. He had to go and visit on business a gentleman who lived far up towards Mickle Fell. A motor car was necessary for this journey, and in defiance of regulations, Pennant took his girl along with him. On the way, they stopped at Langdon Beck, left the car, and walked over the moor to Cauldron Snout.

Here, all around, lay the desolate, unconquerable waste. To their left the dark shoulder of Cronkley Fell, before them the majestic *massif* of Mickle Fell, and away to their right the purple mist shrouded the cleft rampart of High Cup Nick. Three glorious counties—York, Durham, Westmoreland—met almost at their feet.

On the bosom of the brown moor, to the right, lay the almost sluggish waters of the Weal, pale, like

molten steel. The first deep note of the falls—the roar of the hidden torrent—struck with dramatic suddenness upon the ear. Arrival at the brink of the precipitous descent was an unlooked-for climax. The seething brown water, like broth boiling over from the Cauldron's lip, dashed and leaped from boulder to boulder. . . .

The sight took Jacynth by the throat and made her cling to her father's arm with two small, closely-gripping hands, as they stood upon the frail foot-bridge which spans the chasm, and gazed unimpeded upon the wildness that surged below.

Here is no carefully prepared approach as at High Force. Here Nature has done all. Tears gathered in Jacynth's eyes, and one of them presently rolled down upon her father's sleeve, to his great concern, until she confessed that it was caused merely by "too much beauty."

"Or perhaps," she wondered dreamily, "it is too much strength. The strength of the hills! . . . And yet we human things, so weak and tiny—we harness torrents and do as we please with these terrific forces."

"No, by God, we don't! Not all of us!" cried Joseph Pennant hoarsely. "We spend our lives doing that we would not!" . . . He paused, leaning over the rail, and pointed beneath him to where the branch of a tree writhed and shook as the force of the water jammed it against a boulder. "We are like that bit of wood! It started in the quiet Weal—it floated along easily and lazily, it hardly knew it moved, till a great force caught it, flung it headlong, dashed it into the Cauldron upon a course that shall end God knows where!" He checked himself as suddenly as he had begun, and looked at her queerly, sidelong, searching to see if he had horrified her. "I'm not crazy, Jass. But you're young—life is before you! You can't under-

stand what it means, to know all of a sudden that you're not going to get another chance, this side of the grave."

She laid down her head upon his arm, nestling herself against him. "The log of wood has been stopped, father," she told him. "A kind eddy has caught it, and washed it into a quiet place. Take it as an omen—a good one. It *has* been given another chance!"

He was silent, and looking up to see if he were angry, she surprised a passion of love and regret upon his face. "You little angel," he muttered; "sometimes it seems as if she—your mother—had sent you to me, to try and do for me what even she, in Paradise, isn't strong enough to work. You here and she there—will the two of you manage it, do you think?"

She laughed out in a glow of response, lifting her wind-whipped face with its tossed curls, damp with the spray of the falls.

"Yes, yes, we shall be strong enough! Never doubt it!" she cried; and could say no more for the lump in her throat.

This was the only time he spoke in such vein, but she knew he was going through a time of painful stress. Never since her arrival had he given way to his weakness, but as she watched his ravaged face, she guessed that he was paying the price of past indulgence. She planned long days out, either afoot or in the trap, so as to keep him busy all day long. She suggested supper at some inn, in order that he might escape the ordeal of his daughters' drawing-room, and come back thoroughly tired out and ready for bed.

Doss and Margie could not believe that their eccentric sister really preferred a day spent in this manner to a party *chez* Mrs. Grice, with the society of various officers. They pitied her but could not persuade her to change her programme.

Her father and she went all round the village to visit any place which was specially connected in his mind with her mother—more especially the tiny churchyard by the lakeside where one grave held the mother and the baby boy who had been Jacynth's twin. Watching the man's face then, his daughter realised how much of the best and finest in him lay under that smooth sward.

After laying flowers on the grave they went and sat together upon the ancient oaken bench which stood in the little old twelfth century porch of the church. The sun was setting and threw rays of warmly tinted light upon the chimney-stacks of The Place, on the farther shore of the little lake—the home of the Wild Warristouns. Some of the blue-suited Tommies who were being nursed there, were rowing about the lake, or strolling round its margin. A group was sitting in a row upon the churchyard wall, bawling out songs which sounded in Jacynth's ears quite horrible in contrast with the peace and beauty of the God's Acre at their feet.

Why is it that the soldier, for preference, always chooses some song which is wholly senseless, and more or less profane?

“Oh, my old man's a fireman,  
And what d'you think of that,  
He wears gorblimey trousers  
An' a little gorblimey hat!  
He wears a bloomin' choker  
Around his blinkin' throat,  
For my old man's a fireman  
In an Elder-Dempster boat!”

This deplorable ineptitude was being roared out in a delicious baritone by one of the set of madcaps on the wall: and Jass could not decide whether she felt more



disgusted by their taste, or more admiring of the courage and cheerfulness with which the crutched and bandaged band accepted the situation and kept up their spirits in defiance of fate.

It was evident to her presently, by the way the men nudged each other and laughed, that, descrying two of opposite sexes seated in the porch, they were supposing her father and herself to be lovers. Presently the baritone struck up: "If you were the only girl in the world" — and sang it with mischievous intention. Pennant, rapt in his own reflections, noticed nothing; and Jass, inured to the humour of the wounded 'ero, was untroubled. She sat on in silence, respecting her father's mood, and presently the noisy party slid from the wall and went limping and shuffling down to the landing-stage where their boat was waiting to row them back to hospital.

With her eyes upon the sun-gilt chimney-stacks among the trees, Jacynth presently asked: "Is it a fine house—the Place?"

Pennant came out of his reverie and moved uneasily.

"Yes," he said, "it's a fine house, but it wants a lot doing to it. Wonder what'll happen to it now."

"Is there no heir?"

"No Warristoun. The missing man made no will, so I suppose the whole thing goes to the Monklands. They are next-of-kin. Yes, my dear, Captain Monkland will be a match," he added, with a smile and a bit of a sigh.

"Do you yourself believe Mr. Warristoun to be dead?" asked the girl suddenly.

He started. "I can't say. The only thing I'm sure of is that he wants to be thought dead."

"Wants to be thought dead?"

"Yes. In fact, I believe he dare not reappear."

"Why? Because of the suspicion that he——"





"Lord love you, no, kiddie! Because he's afraid of sharing his brother's fate."

There was a long silence.

"Father, do you know anything about that? Anything that other people don't know?"

"Just this. I know that old Warristoun went in fear of his life. I can't tell you why, for he never told me. But as he grew older the thing became an obsession. He never went out alone on foot, for years before his death. But I don't think he fancied that the fate—whatever it was he feared—would strike at his son. The shock of that killed him."

"And you think——"

"I hardly know what I think. After turning it over in my mind at the inquest, I decided to say nothing about it. If Ranulf had not been so completely cleared by the evidence, I might have given my suspicions for what they were worth. But you see—he said nothing either—Ranulf, I mean. So I gathered that he didn't want it mentioned. Because I expect he knows a good bit more about it than I do."

"Well, but tell me—what is it that you suspect?"

"It sounds too absurd when one comes to put it into words, but I suspect some kind of a vendetta. Old Warristoun had been a bad man in his youth. I believe it was connected in some way with that little manor they have in Brittany. Directly his father died, Ranulf went off there. My idea is that he may have gone in order to hunt up the murderer. Well, you know, he disappeared. The war broke out, and the war was supposed to account satisfactorily for all disappearances. I never heard anyone suggest that he may have been put away as his brother was. But it doesn't seem to me impossible."

"Did young Mr. Warristoun never say anything to you about it?"



"He never gave me any information, if that's what you mean. The people who know most about it all are the Stricklands. I wish you could meet them. Miss Strickland was your mother's greatest friend. Do you remember I showed you their house yesterday? The little house where the scallop shell porch is? They have never been home since the outbreak of war."

"Why, where are they? And who are they?"

"As to who they are, Walter Strickland was a parson, who ruined his health working in the east end of London. They went to Brittany for the summer, to do a rest cure, and met the Warristouns there. They struck up a great friendship. In fact, I have heard that old Warristoun wanted to marry Agatha Strickland, but she wouldn't have him. But there was always a very intimate friendship, and the Stricklands bought a tiny cottage at Kerlistec where the Warristouns' château is, and also a house here. I wish you could know Miss Strickland; she's a good sort, but Doss and Margie had a tiff with her. They said she tried to manage them."

"Are they in Brittany now?"

"Yes, they are at the Château Kerlistec, running a small hospital on behalf of Warristoun. He arranged that before he disappeared."

"But then probably the Stricklands know what has become of him, if they were so intimate?"

"No, they don't. Since he went off, October, 1914, they have not heard a word. At least, they had not when I wrote to them, two years ago, to ask. You see, I had to decide about letting the Government use the Place. They could give me no help at all."

"And everything here must be left as it is for seven years?"

"I hope"—he checked back the word very quickly—

"I expect so. If peace comes before that, and no tidings

of him can be obtained, the Monklands may get leave to administer the property sooner."

He rose and looked at his watch. There was an almost uncontrollable irritation in his voice, which his daughter noticed whenever he spoke on this subject. "Want any tea, little woman?" he asked.

"Yes, but not Doss's drawing-room tea," said Jacynth naughtily. "Let's go to old Mrs. Safford, and make her give us cheese-cakes and jam turnovers."



## CHAPTER VI

BY THE LAKESIDE

**L**ADY MONKLAND, considering Jacynth Pen-  
nant as she sat on the lawn at the Grange, came  
to the conclusion that it might be worse.

The agent had driven his daughter up to Mannadale,  
and himself came out into the garden for a few minutes  
to pay his respects.

Her ladyship, who had heard many rumours of late  
with regard to him, began to think that there must be  
considerable exaggeration. The man's manner was  
good—quiet, but assured.

During the afternoon, the attention of Hector's  
aunt was almost entirely centred upon the young girl,  
whom she might be called upon—or so it seemed to  
her—to welcome as a niece.

The impression she received, in spite of the unassum-  
ing exterior and absence of any outstanding attractions,  
was of something strong and fearless. The features  
were fine and carefully cut, the corners of the mouth  
curving inward like those of a Greek statue; and the  
lines of the brow were beautiful. The soft eyes, with  
a spark somewhere in their depths, always made Hec-  
tor think of the star of eve above the mists. Lady  
Monkland was not poetic enough for such a flight. But  
she was observant; and she began to see that in this  
girl was something which could not only attract a man,  
but hold him for ever. . . . In view of what was  
known of Hector's past, could she hope for anything  
better?

Most of the women of their own set knew that the young man had been notoriously unsteady. This girl, coming from a different world, was apparently unaware of it. Doubtless there were dozens of girls who did know and yet would be willing to share his position. Her ladyship could not think of one whom she would prefer to this little girl from outside.

After all, Jacynth was well-born on one side. The strong north-country blood of the Pennants might invigorate the somewhat enfeebled strain of Monkland. Mrs. Rodney, the girl's adopted mother, had been known to Lady Monkland, who spoke of her with appreciation to Jacynth; and Hector with eager pleasure watched the two making friends.

He saw that the sedate little nurse was holding her own. She was quite at home in her surroundings. He began to picture her in a Paquin gown; and told himself that no lady's maid could ever coil the bright hair to such advantage, in its loose Grecian knot. . . . He wished he could feel more sure of her preference for him. She answered his eloquent looks with the grave little smile she had accorded to all her patients at Mauby-en-Grève—the smile that would have given so much had you not felt that it withheld infinitely more.

Dinner at the Grange, on these tennis evenings, was superseded by an informal supper, which did away with difficulties respecting the changing of dress. The convalescent officers, of whom there were ten in all, shared the life of their host and hostess. It was more like a country house-party than a Convalescent Home.

Mr. Pearson had spread the fame of the youngest Miss Pennant as an accompanist, and she was in great demand after supper, when they all assembled in the hall, some smoking round the piano, some dancing.

As for Jacynth, during this, her first visit to the Grange, her mind was filled with keen and somewhat



dreadful memories of the tragic story told her by her sisters so lately. It seemed to her wonderful that the company could be lightly jesting, singing choruses, practising fox-trots and "jazz" steps, in a place which had been the scene of such a horror. She seemed to see the form of Alys Lang, lying there upon the great lion's skin at the foot of the staircase which loomed in the shadows at the end of the hall. As Parish, the butler, a man with a long, secretive face, moved about collecting coffee-cups, she pictured him making the tour of the house at dead of night, coming down those stairs with never a thought of the Thing which a terrified housemaid would encounter there in the dim dawn, a heap of huddled draperies, there, just where young Moffat of the funny nose was now fox-trotting with a pretty nurse.

Even without the Blue Lady of Mannadale, the Grange must surely be a haunted house. She wondered that its owners could continue to live in it, more especially since the war bereft them of their only son.

It was, no doubt, his complete lack of imagination which enabled Sir John to do so. She had been seated next the baronet at supper, and thought him the dullest man it had ever been her lot to converse with. No mental disquiet could ever, she was sure, dominate him; and Lady Monkland must bow to his decision. Since he decreed that she should go on living in the house wherein her dead son had been a baby and a boy and a young man . . . why, she must do it.

But, to Jacynth's sensitive observation, it was evident that the gloom of the house obsessed Captain Monkland. He was as often, she noticed, outside the long windows, in the garden, as he was in the hall. He was restless, and she more than once remarked his gaze riveted on just that place by the stair-foot which drew her own eyes so uncomfortably.

She took leave early, since she was to go home on foot. Her hostess very cordially offered the carriage, but Hector declared that the walk in the moonlight would be just what he would like: so the two were allowed to depart together.

They were hardly out in the drive before the young man gave vent to his feelings in a long sigh. "Ouf! That old place does get on my nerves!"

"What, the Grange?" she asked with interest.

He assented. "It ought to be pulled down," he added resentfully. "It's full of evil influences. I feel as different here from what I used to do in that jolly little shanty at Mauby. . . . Odd thing! When I'm away from this place I always think what an ass I must be to let such a fancy get hold of me. But as soon as I'm back here I'm caught afresh by it."

"It's said to be haunted, isn't it?"

"So it jolly well is, too. But of course nobody may say so. My old uncle, for him the world contains three objects—a horse, a grouse-moor, a dining-table. If you talk to him of ghosts he thinks you're a candidate for Colney Hatch. So don't give me away if I tell you a secret. The minute I come into this place I'm going to pull it down. No power on earth could persuade me to make that house my home."

"Oh, but an old family possession like that——"

"Well, but it's nothing architecturally. Just a lot of bits, shoved together anyhow, first by one beast of a Monkland, then by another who was even worse. If it were the Place, now—have you ever been over Eston-garth Place?"

"No, I have never even seen it, except just the chimneys among the trees."

"You make your father show it to you. That's an *inheritance* to stick to, if you like! You know if Ran

never turns up, that'll be mine, too. I shan't want the old Grange."

"Do you think Mr. Warristoun will not turn up?"

"How can I say? He was always an ill-conditioned brute. I tell you, these northern Dales breed a nasty set of cranks. You, who were brought up in the south, don't even know what I mean. Up here, all winter long, one never exchanges an idea with any human creature. One just stews in one's own juice. You must either take to drink, or get a maggot in your brain. And a long chain of forbears, who all lived that kind of life, makes a weight to drag about with you, I can tell you."

"Oh," cried Jacynth, on the defensive, "but the north-country men are fine! I don't agree with you a bit!"

"No, Flag-Day, you wouldn't! I can't imagine you saying ditto to anybody. That, I expect, is what makes you so magnetic. But what I am giving you now is cold truth. We're an ugly breed round here. I could tell you things—but I won't spoil our walk. Anyway, look what happened to the Warristouns—in Gatesgarth Wood. I expect at least you've heard that pretty story?"

"Yes, I have. But if my father's theory is right, that crime is not to be laid to the account of any Dalesman; he thinks it was someone from France."

"Does he, though? I don't fancy he ever said so to anybody but you. But of course he would stand by the Warristouns. No, Flag-Day, Ran Warristoun shot his brother, right enough. He had plenty of provocation, too. Guy was a rotter, through and through. It was done in a quarrel, no doubt—a fight with fists. He didn't mean to kill. When he realised what he had done, he must have arranged the body as it was found, and *shot it in order to make it seem unlikely that it was*



his work. I wouldn't call it murder. But he did it, right enough. Joyce, the keeper, committed perjury to save his master's skin."

"Captain Monkland, do you really believe what you say?"

His reply was prompt and unhesitating.

"I do believe it. So does pretty well every one. I don't say we were not glad when his alibi held water. The man's our caste, after all. And we all knew Guy. We pitied poor old Ran and didn't want to see him hanged. But there's very little doubt of the fact. Don't you think his going away and hiding himself is a proof?"

"It wasn't a wise thing to do," said Jacynth doubtfully. She wondered whether she should disclose to him the alternative reason for the absence of Warristoun suggested by her father. She decided to say nothing. The whole affair was no concern of hers. Why waste this lovely night by talk on such a subject?

"I expect he got plugged in France long ago," resumed Hector after a while. "I suppose your father never told you whether he—Warristoun—ever drew any money?"

"I am quite sure he cannot have done so. For if he had, my father would have had some chance, however roundabout, of communicating with him, and I know that he has none. He tried every possible method, you know, when it was a question of letting the Government use this house as a hospital. Even detectives."

"Ah, well, that certainly sounds as if Ran was down and out. Well, the Warristouns have held these lands ever since the thirteenth century. They've had their turn. Time someone else came in for a while."

"How unfeeling you are!" she cried; and he laughed a little joyous laugh at her reproof.

"Going to come the nurse over me, are you?" he asked, in tones so suddenly melting that her soul shrank back behind its defences a little.

"I don't like you to run down the people of this Dale," said she, clutching at something impersonal. "It is such a lovely place, I feel the folks born here must show 'the mettle of their pasture.' . . . Ah, look! Only look!"

They were descending the hill, and the lake lay beneath them in the moonlight. Silvery dappled clouds gleamed above the dark still masses of the tree-tops, and caught the light with opal gleams.

"Let us go down to the margin of the lake, and walk round by the footpath," said Hector in a low voice. "It's not much farther."

Something in his voice warned her that to consent might be a decisive thing to do, and she hesitated. But youth and the moonlight called her, and he wisely did not urge; with the result that she laid her hand in his and they plunged together into a steep path which led downward through the hanging woods, and brought them out upon the margin of the water.

There was not a puff of wind. The silver light turned everything into magic. Hector forgot the sinister influences of the Grange—forgot certain episodes in his life which had been clamouring for remembrance that evening; forgot everything but that he was here in an enchanted spot with the sweetest girl in the world, and that "they two stood there, with never a third."

They did not say much for the first few minutes; and what they said was trivial, but each syllable was like a note in a mysterious melody which was singing in both their hearts.

At last their steps paused—as by a common impulse they stood still, and gazed upon the path of glory which

ran from their very feet away to the tree-darkened shadows on the further shore. They were just enough detached from the gloom of the woods behind them for him to be able to see clearly the delicate outline of her face. He caught both her hands in his:

"You wonderful girl!" he murmured urgently, "I wonder if you know . . ." The words were drowned in a sound which rent the silence—a loud shout of silly laughter, which made the lovers jump hastily apart; and a full baritone voice began lustily to carol:

"Oh, my old man's a fireman,  
And what d'you think of that?  
He wears gorblimey trousers  
And a little gorblimey 'at. . . ."

A group of men had been seated, motionless, quite near the unconscious couple, in a seat which was blotted from sight beneath a huge beech tree. They now rose—a string of half a dozen or so—and came swaying and shouting along the path, as if intending to block the passage of the furious Hector and his companion.

The loud outburst of song had probably a friendly intention. It was their method of conveying the knowledge of the proximity of an audience; but it was more than Hector could stand. He cried out "Halt!" so peremptorily that they came to a dead stop on the path before him, realising for the first time that it was an officer in uniform whose privacy they had thus invaded.

The captain did not mince his words. He said he should report their behaviour to the commandant, and see that the lake path was forbidden to them after sunset in future.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" cried one of the irresponsible boys imprudently; and two or three of them broke away and went off laughing with the baritone ring-

leader, who was now singing at the top of his voice, "Who's your lady friend?"

Another of the men, a corporal, realised that they had put their foot in it, and began fumbling apology, which Hector cut short with a scathing reprimand. He said they had taken mean advantage of the kindness shown them, they had acted like a set of drunken Boches, and were making the place impassable for ladies. They took their dressing-down with the utmost meekness, and the corporal ventured civilly to hope that the captain would not report them, a prayer to which Hector turned a deaf ear, striding off with Miss Pennant and leaving them discomfited and sulky.

The spell was broken, the magic mood had passed. Hector's temper was so ruffled that he could speak and think of nothing but the disgraceful behaviour of the soldiers. By the time he had expressed his sense of grievance adequately, they had reached the point where the lakeside path debouched into a lane which led up past the churchyard wall into the village street. In the road stood Joseph Pennant, chatting with one of his keepers. His face lit up as he saw his daughter.

"Ah, little girl, I was on the look-out for you, but was not quite certain which way you would come," said he, adding his thanks to the captain for his escort. Captain Monkland handed over the lady with less regret than he would have thought possible. The vanished mood was impossible of recapture that evening; but there would be others . . . and after all, is not the period of love unconfessed the sweetest of all?

Jacynth and her father pursued their homeward way, arm in arm.

"Like that young chap, Jass?" asked the father after a while.

"Yes, dad, I think I do. I was not sure at first—

he used to be rather tiresome when first he came to Mauby."

"What d'you mean, tiresome?"

"Oh, I don't know. He wouldn't keep rules, and wanted to flirt, and tried to coax one to give him things that were forbidden, and so on. I had to be very strict with him. But he is much nicer now."

"He seems to me improved from what he used to be," observed Pennant in a musing voice. "I daresay finding himself the heir has steadied him down a good bit."

In his heart he was wishing that the hand which seemed likely to open for his daughter the gate of re-entry into her mother's world had not been that of Hector Monkland, who did not bear a good name in the Dale. But if he had turned over a new leaf—if Jass liked him . . . it was a way out—it would ease his mind enormously, should the worst come to the worst, to know that Jass, at least, was out of reach of . . . of what might be before them.

He made a sound, something between a sigh and a groan. His daughter, glancing up at his face, noted there the ravaged look she had so often seen, and which she attributed to the drink craving. She set herself to amuse him—to turn the current of his thought; and before they reached home she had succeeded, for he was smiling.

Lady Monkland was sitting up when Hector returned. It was with inward gratitude that he marked the light in the drawing-room. He hated to come back to the Grange and go upstairs alone at night. His aunt looked up with an anxious smile of welcome as he entered. She was making an attempt, very difficult to a woman of her reticent nature, to reach the heart, or at least the confidence, of the young man who would



one day be master of Mannadale. So far as she could tell, he bore her no affection. His earnest desire to come to the Grange for his convalescence had lighted a momentary spark of hope; but she knew now that his own pleasure had been the sole reason for that whim. Yet it seemed to her that if, instead of withstanding his evident fancy, she gave him sympathy and encouragement, she might perhaps open for herself a path through that outside crust which was all of him that she had ever known.

The world, ever since 1914, had been turning so rapidly topsy-turvy that she felt adrift in it. Deep down in her she nourished a wistful hope that her nephew might do something to reconcile her to a dreadful desert future without Lionel in it—wherein, by some outrageous blunder, she survived, and Lionel did not.

She welcomed the look of gratification which he gave her as he strolled up to the hearth and pushed the logs together with his foot—for in September one is always glad of a fire at night, up in the Dale.

"It was jolly decent of you to sit up for me," he said.

"You're still a convalescent, you know, and I thought you might be hungry. There's some soup in that covered bowl."

He took the offered refreshment gladly, settling himself down in an armchair and staring at the blaze.

"Had you a pleasant walk?" she asked presently.

"It was glorious until we got down upon the lake-side path; and there, passing through the Warristoun grounds, we came upon a lot of half-drunken beasts of Tommies, who started to make themselves objectionable. I don't know who's commandant of that place, but I'm going to jolly well let them have it to-morrow."

His aunt was sympathetic and drew the whole story from him. She had her reward; for when a pause came,

he jerked out, as if half ashamed—the intimate question:

"How do you like Miss Pennant, Aunt Bessie?"

Lady Monkland responded nobly. "She seems an interesting girl, and quite well-bred. You see, she was brought up by Katherine Rodney, as thorough a gentlewoman as ever stepped."

He was evidently much gratified. "I wish," he said presently, "that her sisters were more like her."

"She may improve them. What can you expect? Motherless, and with a father unable to teach what he himself had never learned."

"Quite so. Then you don't think—I mean, it does not seem to you—you don't consider——"

"That Miss Pennant's social handicap is too great to be got over?" Lady Monkland completed his sentence so calmly that he gave a gasp of relief. She laid down her knitting and gazed at the fire before replying.

"Well, there are many things to be considered, are there not?"

"I know it. If you are willing to consider them, Aunt Bessie, that's half the battle. You know you are being—awfully decent to me."

"I want to be decent to you, my boy; with all my heart I wish it. You know there is only you—only you——"

"I know. I want to remember the family, I give you my word I do. I seriously believe that I shall not be letting you and Uncle John down if I can persuade Miss Pennant to——"

"You are sure you have made up your mind? Perhaps you hardly realise what a wide field there is now for you to choose from? For example, Adela Bellairs arrives next week."

"Oh, dash!" cried Hector in consternation, and

pulled himself up with apologies. "Sorry, aunt, I've got no use for Adela. Look at the way she treated poor Ran."

Lady Monkland's face was very grave. "You might pity her a little," said she. "She was not a peer's daughter then, remember. When this war broke out there were three lives between her father and the title, and her mother has always been a most worldly woman. When she found that Adela could have the eldest son, she left her no peace . . . but Adela loved Ranulf, I know she did."

"And you want me to take his leavings?" cried Hector with pardonable warmth.

His aunt laughed. "No, I don't really. I just used her name as typical of many that you might consider."

Hector stooped forward, and the firelight played upon his face. "Well, I've done my considering," said he.

"Very well, Hector. In that case, I promise your future wife the welcome that she ought to have," replied his aunt generously.





## CHAPTER VII

### AMONG THE GRAVES

**T**HE following day was Jacynth's birthday. Doss and Margie had planned their evening party as a birthday treat for her, and she would not for worlds disappoint them by telling them how much she would have preferred some other form of celebration.

She willingly gave her help in the various preparations involved, and bore with the company of Mrs. Grice and Captain Gurdon for the greater part of the day, during which the whole party was engaged in elaborating the various games for competition.

This, the first anniversary of her own birth which she had spent in the Dale, had filled her mind with thoughts of her mother; and in the late afternoon she slipped out of the house and went off upon a little errand of her own unmarked by her sisters, who were taking what they called "a bit of an easy" upon their beds, before the labours of the evening.

Jacynth carried with her a basket of white flowers and some gardening implements. Her goal was the grave she had visited with her father.

How different all her life might have been, had little Harold lived! To have a brother one's own age must be delightful. He, so much more effectively than herself, could have corrected the manners of Doss and Margie. . . . But perhaps, if he had lived, mamma might not have died. And under her guidance how different would the two elder girls have been!

The fine weather which the harvest moon had brought was still holding. The churchyard was an



abode of golden peace. The lake lay absolutely still, every leaf of the great rhododendron clumps which fringed the margin, reproduced in sharp detail upon the bosom of the water. A tenuous mist, faint as breath upon glass, showed in the shadows, and gave a dream-like quality to the charmed hush of the whole scene.

For the first time since the beginning of the war the feelings of the heart were in tune with the beauty of nature. The news from the front was good and grew every day more inspiring. The resistance of Germany on the western front was being broken to pieces. For the first time the end of the devastating conflict seemed to be in sight, and Jacynth's heart sang as she thought: "Perhaps Captain Monkland will not have to go out again."

"I wish," she whispered, as she knelt down upon the grass, "that mother could know how happy her little daughter is to-day."

Then her mind wandered off in speculations as to what Harold's regiment would have been—what part he would have borne in the defence of his country: whether, had he been spared to grow up, she might to-day be kneeling by the grave, not of a babe but of a soldier.

As she worked, invalid Tommies came tramping in their blue uniforms along the central path, singing the same idiotic song:

"Oh, my old man's a fireman!"

She hardly noted their progress, so far away was her fancy. She heard the soft thud of their oars in the row-locks as they pushed off, and felt absurdly sorry that they were cutting the lake looking-glass into ripples as they passed over it. She had brought more flowers with her than she needed, and as she rose from

her knees she noted that the grave where rested the murdered Guy Warristoun was overgrown and neglected.

Its state reproached her. Surely the Pennant family, in the absence of the owners, should see that their graves were kept in order.

Most of the Warristouns slept in the vault under the paved floor of the Warristoun chantry. Guy alone lay out in the churchyard.

Jacynth carried her tools and her basket over to the weedy enclosure, clipped and snipped, trimmed and smoothed, until she had made order out of chaos. The long suckers of a rambler rose she tied neatly with bast along the low iron railing. The grass, when cut, showed coarse and sparse, but she thought a weekly clipping would soon bring it into better condition. Buried under the débris she found the iron frame for a garland, filled it with fresh water, and adorned it with all the flowers she had left.

The result of her labour did not entirely please her, but at least the grave now looked as though some effort had been made to bestow care and tendance.

Rising from her knees, she looked up suddenly, with the consciousness of being watched. A soldier in blue was seated upon an altar-tomb not far off, swinging his legs, and regarding her meditatively, his lips pursed in a silent whistle. She recognised him as the man with a baritone voice, who was always singing the inane song about the fireman.

The west was behind him, and she thought she had never seen a man with such a square head, nor such square shoulders.

When he saw that she looked at him, he cleared his throat in a meaning manner, evidently to attract attention; but a kind of dumb impertinence in his bearing *made her think it best to ignore him, though as a rule*

she was always ready for a chat with a wounded soldier. She collected her materials in her basket, drew off her gardening gloves and turned to pass from between the graves out upon the paved walk. But as she moved the soldier slipped down from the tomb, came quickly forward, and stood facing her, Guy Waristoun's grave between them.

"Having a good old clean up aren't you?" said he, in a tone full of that disagreeable familiarity for which his manner had prepared her.

Yet she found herself unable to snub the man—one of those who had, as it were, come through hell—and she answered him gently and patiently. "Yes, I've tried to tidy it up a bit. What a beautiful evening, isn't it?"

He gazed down meditatively at the headstone. "That poor chap under the daisies would be flattered if he knew what trouble you took for him," he remarked. Then looking up suddenly and contemplating her with a sort of contemptuous amusement: "Sorry we lads interrupted your moonlight stroll last night."

This amazed her, for she was accustomed to a very different attitude on the part of the soldiers she had nursed. In her astonishment, she looked him squarely in the eyes, to see what manner of man this was who could find amusement in annoying a stranger. There must have been considerable expression in her quiet glance, for he looked disconcerted. In fact, each of them apparently found unexpected elements in that quick interchange; for something in his face, joined to his voice, suggested to her that he was that nondescript being, a gentleman ranker.

She decided that it would be best not to answer him, nor hold any further talk, so she picked up her basket, and turned away.

"*Don't be in such a hurry,*" said he, still with that

disagreeable inflection of voice. "I'm going to trouble you to take a message for me."

"I am afraid you must find someone else to do that," she replied quite calmly. It had occurred to her that he was a little wrong in his head, as those who suffer from shell-shock sometimes are. She knew that in that blue uniform he could not obtain anything intoxicating, or she might have thought him tipsy. To leave the corner where she had been at work she must pass him, and as he realised that she meant to walk away and leave him, he spoke again, in a tone which suggested that his question was not mere rudeness, but was asked with a purpose.

"That other grave you were trimming up belongs to old Joe Pennant," said he. "May I venture to ask if you're old Joe's daughter?"

"Your question is anything but civil," said she. "What if I am Mr. Pennant's daughter?"

"I told you I was going to ask you to carry a message," said he, his eyes fixed upon her as if he found some secret pleasure in baiting her. "Just tell the old boy that Mr. Warristoun will look round on him some time this evening."

Jacynth started. She stared at the man for a moment—long enough to enable her to reflect that, if Warristoun had returned, this man, who came from the Place, would be likely to know of it. "Mr. Warristoun!" she repeated. "Has he come back? Did he tell you to give the message?"

"Yes, Warristoun's back right enough. He's at the Place," said he, smiling a little. "He didn't give me the message. That's pure friendliness on my part. I happen to know that he means to drop in this evening to see old Joe, about nine o'clock. Good evening."

He turned away, whistling the first bars of the *fireman's song*; but before he had gone many steps he

paused, faced round and added: "I advise you to deliver that message. If I'm not mistaken, old Joe'll be glad to have warning, even if it's a short one."

His voice, as he spoke these last words, dropped upon a note that sounded quite serious. Immediately he turned away, moved hurriedly to the landing stage, jumped into a little dinghy which was moored there, and pulled off in the direction of the hospital.

Jacynth stood a while without moving. She felt shaken. Could this news be true? . . . Only last night Hector had remarked: "Most likely he got plugged long ago in France." Her father had given as his opinion that the Squire of Estongarth wished to be thought dead, and dared not appear. Moreover, it seemed improbable that such an excitement as the return of the missing man could be kept secret! If the news were true the agent would have been immediately informed.

There had been no mistaking the inference which underlay the soldier's words. He implied that the return of the master would be very unwelcome to Joseph Pennant. A preposterous idea, and most insulting; since the only reason for such a state of things must be that he had failed in his trust.

She returned to her idea that the man who accosted her was slightly wrong in his head. He might have met Ranulf Warristoun in France, perhaps, and was trading upon that knowledge?

She found herself quite unable to decide whether to take his communication seriously or not—whether to mention it to her father or to keep silence?

She reached home but just in time to make her toilette for the party. It was long since she had worn an evening gown, but she had possessed some expensive ones in Mrs. Rodney's life-time, and one of these had been *successfully re-modelled*. When it was on, she

was pleased with her own appearance. Would Captain Monkland like it, she wondered? He had never seen her so garbed before.

They had an informal meal, in Pennant's office, as the rest of the house was prepared for the evening. Pennant had promised to be home in time for this meal, and his daughters were vexed because he was still out. A little qualm of apprehension swept over Jacynth's mind. What if he had heard the news? What if he were detained—or what if, that evening of all evenings, he should come home in a state unfit for company?

Ah, no, he would not do it, on her birthday! She rallied her spirits. He would not fail his little Jass thus.

Her faith was justified. He came in presently, quite himself and full of apologies. He had been all the way to Darlington to purchase a gift for his lass, and the train was late.

His gift was a charming little wrist watch upon a gold bangle, and Jass received it with delight. The elder girls ran away, leaving her to see that he did not linger, and to send him upstairs to dress as soon as he had eaten something. Mrs. Grice was to arrive early, and they wanted her to find everything in the perfect order upon which Doss very legitimately prided herself.

"Well, how's my lass enjoying her birthday?" asked Pennant quite cheerily, as he ate his cold pie.

She laughed. "I've had to work so hard, I've hardly had time to think! Everything is ready, and it all looks so pretty! The girls are very capable, you know. . . . However, I managed to go up to the churchyard, to put some flowers on mother's grave. . . . By the way, dad, I told you how rude those soldiers were last night down by the lake? Well, I



had an odd little encounter with one of them this afternoon in the churchyard."

He looked up keenly, ready to take fire at the least suggestion that anyone had been rude to his darling.

"It was a hulking big soldier who has a splendid voice," said she. "He started talking to me, and was insolent, in a queer kind of way. I don't know if he was quite right in his head, but he asked me if I was your daughter, and gave me a most curious message for you."

"A message for me?" Pennant stared, mystified.

"Yes. He said I was to tell you that Mr. Warristoun has come back—that he is at the Place—and that he is coming round here this evening to see you."

The effect of her words was to her deeply shocking. Pennant leaped to his feet. He rested his clenched hands on the table, and his face became suffused—almost purple.

"It's a lie," he stuttered, as though he could hardly articulate, "a d—d lie! Why do you go repeating such nonsense?"

"Why, only because he said it. Of course I don't suppose it's true. I don't see how Mr. Warristoun *could* be at home without it's being cried all up and down the Dale." The girl's heart was beating heavily, and she felt her knees shaking, for her father's attitude scared her. "It may have been meant for a joke—or an insult," she continued hastily, "but he said, in a sneering sort of way, that you would be glad of any warning, however short."

"The . . . impudent liar! The . . . infernal scoundrel!"

"But dad, dear, I don't understand. If by any chance it is true, you would be very glad to see Mr. Warristoun safe and sound, wouldn't you?"

His congested eyes rested upon her face. He tried



to contort his stiff lips into a smile. With a long breath he seemed to come to his bearings, and looked round the room as if he had never seen it before. Then he turned, walked to the side-board, clicked open the tantalus, poured a tumblerful of brandy and came back to the table with it in his hand. As he sank into a chair, Jacynth noted that the face which had been so florid had turned a sickly greenish colour. He held the glass to his lips, and was so manifestly in need of some stimulus that she let him take several mouthfuls before stretching her hand and taking the glass away.

"Let me alone," he muttered irritably. "I must think—I must think."

She sat there with her eyes upon his face and all her heart in them. He pulled out his watch with shaking hand. "Just an hour," he murmured, "just one hour." He seemed to contemplate her without seeing her, and his eyes looked glazed. After staring at her thus blindly for some minutes, he put away her detaining hand, took up the tumbler of brandy, and drained it. Then he rose to his feet and stood passing his fingers through his thick curly hair.

"All right," said he deliberately. "That was sudden, you know. After four years. Most probably it's a lie. But anyway, I must go and change, or Doss and Marge will have my blood—hey? Bless you, my darling, don't worry yourself. How sweet you look, Jass! That's a very pretty frock."

She put up her arms and joined her hands behind his bull neck.

"I feel as if I had been the messenger of bad tidings."

"Well, well! If it's true, I'm glad you've told me, and if it's not, I've got a nasty turn for nothing. In



that case we'll find out what this soldier meant by his impudence. Could you identify him?"

"Quite easily. I have seen him about several times."

"Very good. I say, little woman, don't mention this to your sisters. It's a bit awkward, coming on their party night—eh? That is, if there should be anything in it. . . . Of course it's not impossible—nothing's impossible!" His voice trailed off and he stared, as it were, into the future.

"Only one thing's impossible, and that is that my dad should be—anything but what I think him," said she with her cheek against his.

He took her very gently by the shoulders and held her off at arms' length.

"The bit of wood has started on its last journey—over the cataract," said he; and with a wry smile he went out of the room.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MISSING MAN

JACYNTH had once indulged in the thought that her passage through life was something like that of Alice Through the Looking-glass, so sharply was it divided into sections.

Until she was nineteen, her life at Bournemouth had been mapped out precisely like the squares of a chess-board, into meal-times, rest times, exercise times, shopping times, church times, and so on.

From that inertia, the buffeting she received as a probationer at a large London hospital, had seemed at the time the utmost she could picture by way of contrast. Yet the years in France which followed had been full of a fierce struggle previously unimaginable, the doing of two people's work at the risk of your life, day in, day out.

Then had come the comparative rest and security of Mauby-en-Grève, and now the return to her native Dale was like the entry into yet another square, totally unlike any of those preceding it. For that she had been more or less prepared. But not for this latest, most bewildering development.

When the door closed upon her father, she felt that she must have a few minutes in which to pull herself together; for she had an impression as of an abyss insecurely boarded over, beneath her feet.

Something ugly and menacing hovered vaguely in the future.

She had been very happy that afternoon. Lady



Monkland's cordiality the previous day had been quiet yet definite. Evidently she did not look upon the youngest Miss Pennant as beyond the pale.

And now, this hooded thought—this sickening suspicion . . . Could there be any reason but one for her father's shrinking from a meeting with his employer? He must surely dread the ensuing reckoning . . . and the idea fitted in but too fatally with his recent rapid deterioration, with his efforts to drown the appeals of conscience.

If this were true, he would be dismissed—turned out of his agency in disgrace. Should that occur, the Monkland family could hardly stretch their toleration so far as to accept such a man's daughter in their family.

There would be another sensation in the Dale; and the flood of injurious comment would sweep away not only Pennant, but his daughters with him—over the cataract.

. . . The impudent soldier had been intentionally spiteful. He was no doubt angry because Captain Monkland had reported him to the commandant. He had sought a weapon with which to attack. The puzzle was that he should have hit upon this.

How did he know—how *could* he know—the thing of which Pennant's own daughter had been ignorant—that the return of Mr. Warristoun would be a calamitous piece of news for Mr. Warristoun's agent?

If it were just a malicious joke, still the sting remained—the memory of her father's reception of the message.

She was aroused from these thoughts by the sounds of gay voices raised high in laughter and greeting.

Of course! There was a party that night! Into the midst of it would walk the spectre at the feast—that is, if he really existed. She felt that this must

be prevented, and hastened, soft-footed, to the kitchen.

"Nora," said she to the parlourmaid, "it is possible that a gentleman may call this evening, on private business, to see Mr. Pennant. If anyone arrives whose face you do not know, ask his name; and if he says he is Mr. Warristoun, show him into the office and tell Mr. Pennant quietly."

Nora opened her eyes very wide. "Mr. Warristoun! Never!" cried she with avid curiosity.

"I heard a rumour to-day in the village that he has come back," said Jacynth hastily. "I don't much think it can be true; but if he were to come he would not want to find himself in the midst of a party."

She had not been prepared for the sensation she created, and to prevent further questioning, ran away forthwith, leaving the maids gazing one upon the other and asking if this could be true.

Upon entering the drawing-room, the heroine of the evening found herself the centre of much kind cordiality. Since Mrs. Grice discovered that Captain Monkland admired Jacynth, she had been most assiduous in her attentions. Captain Gurdon brought a box of chocolates, which, in the chocolate famine which reigned in the autumn of that year, was more than acceptable. Mr. Pearson brought a new song, from the latest revue, and Hector a bouquet of roses and carnations from the Grange hot-houses.

The sight of him, looking just as usual, with his manner of deferential attention and his customary friendliness, was reassuring. Had his cousin really come home, he must have known of it. She began to feel sure that the man in the churchyard had lied.

The various games, which had seemed so silly while they were planning them that afternoon, became quite interesting now that Hector was present, as keen as *some big schoolboy*, throwing cards into a waste-paper

basket, threading needles in record time, trimming a lady's hat, or writing from memory a list of a miscellaneous collection of articles on a tray.

In the general hilarity, Jacynth forgot to watch the door. She did not even remark her father's non-appearance. She was whole-heartedly absorbed in the fun of the thing; and when an interval for refreshments was announced, she saw, from a glance at the clock, that the fatal hour was long past.

The night, like the preceding one, was calm and moonlit, unusually warm for a northern autumn. In view of the mild temperature, the girls had arranged some chairs outside the window, on the gravel path or terrace which lay between the house and the croquet lawn. Nobody was making use of these seats, so Hector and Jacynth drifted out there, and found themselves in a delightful seclusion.

As on the evening before, by the lake, intercourse became a miracle. Their simplest words held new and wonderful meanings. The sudden interruption which yesterday had snapped the delicate cord of communion had made Hector wary. He had no intention of rushing his fences to-night; and this very quality in his mood made the girl less shy. She wanted to speak to him of the rumour which had troubled her; and by way of approaching the subject circuitously, she told him that she had been clearing nettles and brambles from Guy Warristoun's grave that afternoon.

"What was his brother Ranulf like?—to look at, I mean," she asked musingly.

"Ran? Oh, an ugly brute. How can I describe him? He just had a working set of features, you know, that's all you could say about him. I remember when I was a boy I used to think his eyes were like flints—*do you know what I mean?*—a rusty, opaque

surface, with a dark, glutinous interior showing through where the crust is chipped?"

"Oh yes, I do know what you mean! I've seen eyes like that. But I never thought of a flint. It's a good description."

"Got 'em from some ancestral cave-man, I expect. He's rather like one himself. Now, have you finished that stuff? Let me go in and get you some bottled fruit. You know, Miss Pennant is a wonder, she seems to have her store-room stuffed with all the things one can't get anywhere else."

He was rising to his feet as he spoke; and his words were cut off abruptly. He stood quite still, staring over his companion's head. "Good God!" said he under his breath; and at the amazement in his face and voice Jacynth turned round sharply.

A few paces from them, where the light from the open window fell brightly across the gravel, was standing the blue uniformed soldier who had accosted her in the churchyard.

The expression upon the hardy adventurer's face was to her wholly unreadable; and she turned from him to ascertain the reason for Hector's strange silence.

He was white as paper, and as she drew a step nearer to him he uttered one word, "Ranulf?" The inflection was as though he asked a question—as though he thought the man before him might be an apparition.

"Oh, so you recognise me now," said the intruder, sauntering forward. "You didn't last night, did you, though I shouted loud enough! Yes, I'm Ranulf. How are you, Hector? You seem awfully fit."

The contrast between the two men—one in the sloppy blue linen clothes, the other in all the advantages of good valeting and tailoring—was cruel.

Monkland extended a hand with a reluctance almost

to be described as shrinking. The other took it, and flung it from him contemptuously.

"It isn't such hard lines as you think," said he. "There has never been an intestacy. Strickland has my will, and you are not my heir, so don't make yourself too miserable over my survival."

"The same bitter devil you always were!" broke out Hector, in uncontrollable mortification.

"I don't suppose I've changed much. Have *you?*" was the swift retort. "That's perhaps the more urgent question. I hope you have, for this young lady's sake." He made a slight inclination of the head towards Jacynth. "You might introduce me."

"Save yourself the trouble, Captain Monkland," said the girl quickly. "Mr. Warristoun had an excellent chance to introduce himself this afternoon, but he preferred not to take it. Mr. Warristoun—I will go and inform 'old Joe Pennant' that you are here."

As she spoke, she moved away and disappeared through the window into the empty drawing-room, which she crossed, stumbling a little, and found herself in the hall, listening to the loud talking and laughter which came from the dining-room. Quite unnerved, she sat down upon the stairs while she tried to brace herself that she might support her father in his need. The knowledge that the owner of the Place was—what he was, had changed her whole outlook in a flash. Since this was Ranulf Warristoun, she was ready to agree with Hector, not merely in holding that he had better never have returned, but even in supposing he might be guilty of his brother's death. Wholly new reasons for her father's way of taking the news now presented themselves. What if the agent knew things of which others were ignorant? Since the estate passed so completely into his hands, facts not available at the



time of the inquest might well have come to his knowledge. She felt sure that he must know this to be a bad man, and that he dreaded, with only too good reason, to feel his hand upon the reins.

Meanwhile, the two whom she had left confronting one another had soon realised, as Englishmen will, the impossibility of melodrama. Hector pulled himself together, and got out a few words of welcome. Warristoun produced cigarettes and offered them; and they had just lighted up when a step which dragged, or shuffled slightly, was heard upon the gravel behind them, and Pennant made his appearance.

He had put on evening clothes, and was freshly shaved. But his manner was subtly different from what it had been upon the previous day when he came to Mannadale. There was a hint of nervousness, his eye was uneasy, his cordiality overdone.

"Masquerading, Mr. Warristoun, masquerading!" said he, after the first interchange of greeting. "The prince attired as the beggar—eh? Most romantic. Since when have you been among us—er—unsuspected, like this? Eh, sir?"

"About a fortnight," said Warristoun, his eyes travelling keenly over his agent's face.

"A fortnight? Think of that now!" Pennant addressed himself to Hector. "Something like playing the spy—eh? Think it was quite fair—fair to me?"

"What's it got to do with you?" asked Warristoun coolly. "I don't have to ask your permission to go into hospital, do I?"

Pennant began to giggle feebly. "In your own house, too," he said. "Well, sir, if it was against your wish that the Place was let to His Maj'sty's Gov'n'm't, I'm sorry. I consulted Cozens and Marks. I con-

sulted Mr. Strickland. Could do no more. Couldn't consult you, unfort'nitly."

"I don't complain," replied Warristoun shortly; adding: "Miss Pennant gave you my message this afternoon?"

"My daughter had no idea that it was delivered by Mr. Warristoun himself."

"My stupidity, that. If I had told her who I was she would probably have explained that you were engaged this evening, and I shouldn't have intruded. Will you give me an appointment some time to-morrow morning, Pennant?"

"Oh, but you mustn't go away! My daughter'd be very—very much annoyed if I let you go. Won't you come along and have a bit of something to eat or drink?"

Hector spoke, suddenly. "Yes, do. Just the chance for the wounded hero stunt. Sort of thing you do so well. Or you might get a pal of your own sex to go round the garden with you and hoot if you saw a couple talking together."

Pennant saw no satire in these suggestions. "Capital! Capital!" said he. "Never mind the uniform! A bit of fun when one gets back to Blighty, eh, sir?"

"No, thanks, I'm off," said Warristoun decidedly.

"Eleven o'clock to-morrow morning do for you, Pennant?"

"Of course I'll make it convenient to attend you, sir, any time you name. Hadn't I better come up to the Place? The office has been reserved for me all through the occupation."

"No," said Warristoun decidedly, "I'll come here. Suppose I come to lunch?"

The agent was so surprised that he stared for a moment without reply; and then his attention was dis-

tracted. Jacynth, her search for him indoors being fruitless, had come back, and was standing in the drawing-room window. Hearing her father's voice, she conquered even her repugnance to Mr. Warristoun, and came out, going up close to Pennant and linking her hands round his arm. She knew at once that, although far from tipsy he had drunk more than he should, and she said:

"Father, I think Mr. Warristoun will see that this is hardly the moment for a business talk."

"Exactly what I am just telling your father, Miss Pennant," said the squire quickly. "I'll be here to lunch to-morrow. And now I'm off." He moved away a few steps, and then, as he had done in the churchyard, he turned back. "Of course I wouldn't have butted in if I had known you had friends," he began.

Pennant had put his hand over his eyes as if to collect himself. "Jass—little girl," he muttered, "ask Mr. Warristoun to stay."

Warristoun paused as if to receive the entreaty. Jacynth detached her arm from her father's and turned to go indoors. "My sister Doris will, I am sure, give the invitation," said she in freezing accents. "I will call her." She caught a gleam of delight in Hector's eye at the dexterously administered snub, as she moved away.


"I say, Miss Pennant," called the squire after her, "let me just say I'm sorry I played the goat this afternoon. I know it wasn't a bit funny."

She paused, in act to depart. "Oh, why say that? I am sure your friends—the ones you had with you down by the lake last night—would have thought it, screamingly funny," said she, with a curl of those lips which Lady Monkland had thought so well moulded.

*With that, she retreated into the house, Hector at*

her heels, while Pennant began to assure Warristoun that she meant no offence—she was the best little girl in the world—she was simply anxious not to take her elder sister's water, so to speak. . . .

Before he was halfway through, his visitor was off.





## CHAPTER IX

### THE NEWS SPREADS

WHEN Captain Monkland and the young men who had with him been guests at Free Croft, returned to the Grange that evening, the whole group of them went upstairs together, escorting each other to the doors of their respective rooms in a manner which might have seemed odd to a casual observer. Nothing at all had been said, so far as the Monklands knew, by or to any of these young men with regard to the haunting. Yet everyone knew that everyone else knew; and tacitly it was decided that it was more comfortable to be accompanied by one or more friends when ascending the main staircase late at night.

This arrangement left Hector, as host, alone at last; and it was with relief that he saw, as he hastened along the corridor, the door of her ladyship's boudoir ajar, and a light within.

He knocked at once, and was bidden most cordially to enter. But when he had flung himself down upon a chair opposite his aunt, she was shocked at his gloomy face.

"My dear Hector, has anything happened?"

"It has, with a vengeance," was the grim reply. "You'd never guess, so I'd better tell you straight out. But prepare for a shock. *Ranulf has come back.*"

Lady Monkland rose to her feet as if automatically. "Never!"

"He has, though. Where do you suppose he is? Up at the Place, wearing a blue suit and a red neck-

tie. A private soldier. That's Ran all over, isn't it?"

"Well, upon my word!" It was all she could manage. "Have you seen him yourself?"

"Indeed I have. He made himself known with all his own charm of manner. Said there had never been an intestacy—that Strickland had his will, and that I was not his heir. Oh, he's a dear fellow. A dear fellow!"

"How unpardonable, Hector! What reason can he have for making himself offensive to you?"

"Oh, I don't know. He's got his knife into everybody. I wouldn't be in old Pennant's shoes at this minute for something. I'm fairly convinced that the old boy has been going it with that power of attorney. They were hinting at something of the kind down at Bircastle the other day when my uncle was on the bench."

Her eye met his in troubled understanding.

"Oh, Hector, I do trust, if that is so, that Ran won't push things to extremes. There are enough obstacles in the way already—without that."

Her nephew made no reply. He sat gazing into the fire and thinking most unchristian thoughts of his cousin. His aunt was busy turning things over in her mind. At last she said:

"Well, perhaps Adela will tame him for us. She arrives to-morrow. What will she say to this news?"

"Say to it?" Hector looked up keenly. "She must have heard it! He must have sent her some kind of a message, and she's coming here to pick up the dropped stitches! As she had no scruple about changing over from Ranulf to Guy, she'll have no difficulty in persuading herself that Ranulf's alibi was all right."

"Hector, don't say things like that," said her ladyship sharply. "You know as well as I do that Ran had nothing to do with Guy's death."

"Yes, just as well as you do, which is—not at all. If Ran didn't do Guy in, can you suggest who did?"

She shook her head. "But for all that, it's wicked of you, Hector. The coroner said no shadow of suspicion could rest upon him."

"Tut, tut! Do you suppose Joyce would hesitate at perjury?"

"But there was the quite independent testimony of that chauffeur of Adela's, who had been all the way to Bircastle on foot for a new bit of something for the car; he came forward of his own accord, to say he had walked behind Ran all the way from the town, and saw him go into the wood by the gate he said he used, at the opposite end from where the body was found. It was conclusive."

"Adela didn't want Ran hanged if she meant to marry him. She squared the chauffeur. Or—by George, here's an idea! Suppose she paid the chauffeur to put Guy out of the way, so that she could have Ran?—that is, if you're right in saying she preferred him."

"Oh, Hector, you're incorrigible. I won't talk to you if you say such things."

"Sorry, Aunt Bessie. I'm in a beast of a temper, and that's the truth. Ran spoilt my evening."

"Fancy his being a private! What's he been serving in?"

"Didn't ask him. I don't care if he's been serving the devil. He most likely has. However, you had better ask him up here, and then you can pump him to your heart's content, so long as you don't ask me to do the long-lost-brother stunt. I hate the brute."

Meanwhile, at Free Croft, the news of the return of the owner of the Place produced a sensation not to be described. The guests clustered in groups to dis-



cuss it. The competitors paled in interest, the prizes awoke but languid enthusiasm. Mr. Warristoun back—back as a Blue Boy—back as a wounded hero—and in that character an inmate of his own house, under orders, disciplined, not allowed to put on mufti! It seemed incredible.

Warristoun would have been much surprised had he known the sensation he had created. The enterprising Pearson shrank into sheer insignificance. Even Captain Monkland was no longer the biggest star in the firmament. Doss began to think it providential that she was still unmarried. Fate might have reserved her for this brilliant destiny.

Meanwhile, Jacynth's attention was centred upon her father. All that she could be sure of was that he was shaken, and apprehensive. Every moment she was feeling more certain that it was not his own misdeeds which were responsible for his trouble, but that he was in possession of some secret knowledge which, in view of the squire's return, he doubted if he ought to conceal.

She was convinced that Pennant was a first-rate agent. She had seen his own pride in the property, and had heard many a tribute to his able management, and the way in which he had fought the difficulties created by the war.

If he would but confide in her!

They had no chance of talk together until all the guests had disappeared. She had remained at his elbow continuously, since the visit of the squire, and had seen that he drank nothing more. The slight muddling of his senses had now passed off, and he was evidently fully alive to the situation. Jacynth crept close to him where he sat upon a sofa staring blankly before him.



"Dad," she whispered, "I'm not a fool. I know something's wrong. I can see you are unhappy. Is there anything—*anything*—that I can do to help?"

He looked up at her. His eyes appraised her. Then he dropped his gaze as though ashamed of some thought that might have appeared in it.

"There's one thing," he muttered, "one thing that might help. Be civil to that man—to Warristoun—conciliate him, if you can."

Jacynth started, aghast at such a notion. She felt like Naaman, that she, who would have sacrificed everything, was being asked to submit to just the one trifling humiliation to which she could not stoop.

"Dad! If you had heard him speak to me this afternoon, you wouldn't ask me that!"

"I know, I know. He's an ill-conditioned brute; all the Warristouns are alike. But for all that, I ask you to do it. Put pride in your pocket, Jass, and make him welcome when he comes to lunch to-morrow. See that he has a good one—not the beef and beer they give the Tommies up there."

"All right, dad, I'll speak to Doss. She is sure to see to all that, and I believe she and he would get on admirably. She's perhaps not so ridiculously thin-skinned as I am."

"Pooh! He won't look at Doss and Margie! He's one of your mother's kind, ill-mannered though he may be—the real thing."

"Dad, he's nothing of the sort—he's an insufferable cad."

"Cad or no, for God's sake conciliate him. Otherwise, I shan't believe you care a tinker's curse for your poor old dad."

Meanwhile, the elder Miss Pennants had been to *the kitchen*, to discuss with the maids the way in which



all had gone off, and the wonderful and exciting news of the return of the master of the Place.

"Miss Jacynth, she ran into the kitchen just before folks began ringing the bell," said Nora, "and she told me Mr. Warristoun might call."

The rest of the communication was drowned in a mingled scream of astonishment from the young ladies: "*Miss Jacynth told you he might come?*"

"Yes, miss. If he came, I was to show him into the office quietly like. But he never rang the bell at all, miss. I suppose he heard you all talking and laughing, the windows being wide open, and he just strolled into the garden to see what was going on."

"But how on earth did Jass know?" And as the maids could give no enlightenment, they rushed together into the drawing-room, cutting short the talk between Jass and her father. They were loud in their reproaches that their sister should have known the tremendous secret and left them in the dark.

"But, dear girls, I didn't believe what he said. I thought he was 'having me on' for some reason. He pretended he was just a messenger, and how should I know any better?"

Margie laughed rather scornfully. "Couldn't you see he was a gentleman? He probably expected you to guess."

"He didn't behave like a gentleman," replied Jacynth disdainfully.

"He must have thought you were one of our servants," was Doss's flattering suggestion. "Seeing you there tidying up."

Just for a moment Jacynth wondered if this disagreeable suggestion could be the fact. It was not unreasonable that he should conclude that a girl whom he had seen strolling in the moonlight with Hector would be *one who might* be freely accosted.

The thought could endure but an instant. He knew who she was, for he sent a message by her to her father. The resulting inference was plain. He did not expect her father's daughter to be a gentlewoman.

But Pennant cried out indignantly. "Don't talk confounded nonsense, Doss. The chap was offensive because he couldn't resist the chance to be. He can't help himself. He did apologise, though, didn't he, Jass?"

"He made something which might perhaps be called an apology," replied Jacynth grudgingly; and she coloured as she thought how ungraciously she had received it.

Her father looked at her disdainful mouth and uttered the first rough words he had ever used to her.

"Just my d—d luck, to have you set yourself against the man, when so much depends, for me, upon his being stroked the right way! Here's new men and new methods all over the place, and I may be swept out like old lumber before I know where I am; and what are you girls going to do then, I wonder? . . . Understand me, Jass, whether you like him or whether you don't, my orders are that you don't give Waristoun the rough side of your tongue to-morrow."

Jacynth, white as ashes, sprang up from her seat. She was struggling with sobs. "Very well, father," said she almost inaudibly; and left the room immediately, repressing her tears until the door had closed upon her.

"As for you two," said Pennant, glancing at his elder daughters, "see to it that the man has a good meal. It means more to you than to her, perhaps—she has a trade to fall back upon, and you haven't."

"Leave it to us, dad," said Margie heartily; "you know it really doesn't matter much about Jass. She's



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always so quiet, nobody would notice her much. But if the poor squire wants a bit of fun, after serving as a private all these years, why, we'll see that he gets it, won't we, Doss?"

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## CHAPTER X

### THE SQUIRE AT LUNCH

**W**HEN Mr. Warristoun, still in his blue slops, made his appearance at Free Croft the following day, he found two charmingly attired young ladies awaiting him under the shadow of the acacia on the lawn, with work and books; an attractive domestic picture.

"We must introduce ourselves," said Doss expansively. "I am Miss Pennant, and this is my sister Marjorie. We are so glad to give you a welcome home!"

"I should have known you anywhere," cried Marjorie eagerly, "from your likeness to your father's portrait over the mantelpiece in the billiard room at the Place."

"I fancy I've seen you there—up at the hospital, haven't I?" asked Warristoun, shaking hands in a negligent way, and sitting down gingerly as if doubtful whether the deck-chair provided would bear his weight.

His lack of cordiality made no impression at all upon his hostesses.

"Oh yes," they cried in chorus, "we go up there regularly, to help."

"I go to the linen room to mend, for Matron." This from Doss.

"And I to the ward where the bed cases are, to teach them to make Smyrna rugs," added Marjorie.

"You are energetic," remarked the visitor, glancing round as if looking for someone else.

"Oh, that's not all our war work—only a very small department of it," cried Doss; and she proceeded to give a full account of the village activities in the way of socks, mufflers, surgical appliances and lending libraries.

"And what," inquired he in the first pause, "what does your youngest sister do in the Great War?"

"Jacynth? Oh, didn't you know? She's a real swell—a nurse! Been in France ever since 1914. Only home on leave," cried Doss, who was proud of Jass's record.

"She had done such splendid work," chimed in Margie, "and she was in that hospital the Boches bombarded, I forget the name of the place, so they gave her a decoration and sent her to a convalescent place on the coast, where she met Captain Monkland. Oh yes, we think she's done her share!"

"Sounds like it, at any rate."

"I suppose she'll have to go back at the end of her leave, but my father is very reluctant to part with her. You see, she never was at home at all until now; we never knew our own sister. Isn't it quaint?"

Glad of a topic for conversation, they gave him the history of Jacynth's adoption, and of her being left, through Mrs. Rodney's carelessness, quite without means.

The taciturn visitor listened apparently with attention, and presently remarked meditatively: "A nurse, was she? That accounts for a good many things, doesn't it?"

"Now, whatever d'you mean by that?" cried Margie in a rallying voice. "Accounts for a good deal! What is there in poor little Jass that wants accounting for?"

"I must leave you to decide that," was his reply, spoken with his eyes fixed, either on the lawn or on Margie's foot, clad in white silk stockings and white pipe-clayed shoes, swinging seductively to and fro just under his nose.

The two girls thought that his silence was meant to be provocative, and joined in demanding an explanation. It was mean, they told him, with arch glances, to say a thing like that and then refuse to explain.

"Where is your sister now?" he demanded at length, with a total indifference to all they had been urging, which somehow threw them back upon themselves and made them feel uncertain.

"I expect," said Doss in much soberer tones, "that she's out with my father. They are always together. It's a bit selfish of the old man, we think, when she has such short leave. Several times she has missed a jolly afternoon party, through being off up on the moors with him."

"Come in drenched to the skin they do," put in the other sister.

"Oh, well, she's not drenched now," observed the squire, rising to his feet as Jacynth in her habit came round the corner of the house.

She had not been prepared to find him already arrived, and she paused a moment, as if about to beat a retreat; but on second thoughts came on, bowed to him distantly and said to Doris: "I had no idea we were late. Is there time for me to change?"

Doss glanced at the plain little habit, and felt all the advantage which her own gay muslin and lace gave her.

"As Mr. Warristoun is here, it might be better not to keep him waiting," said she.

"*All right.* I'll just wash my hands and come

as I am," replied Jacynth; and walked indoors by the window without another glance at the guest.

They were almost immediately summoned to lunch, and Pennant appeared subdued and rather haggard, greeting his chief with a deference which was in strong contrast with his youngest daughter's chilly manner.

She rejoined them almost as soon as they sat down to table, still wearing her hat and habit.

The table was laid with a profusion of silver and flowers, and the meal was elaborate.

The note struck by Jacynth's appearance was a new one, and Doris eyed the girl uncertainly. Somehow, her composure, and her calm air of taking lunch as an incident in a busy morning, was impressive. The hostess had a suspicion that the feast provided was an error of judgment, and that a few rissoles or a salmi of game, with cold meat on the sideboard, would have been what she called "better style." The doubt touched poor Doss in her most vulnerable point—her own knowledge of social customs—and made her ill at ease.

She had begged leave of her father to invite Captain Gurdon by way of making them six instead of five; but he had peremptorily refused to allow it. Jacynth, in consequence, sat by herself on one side of the table, the visitor being on Doss's right, with Marjorie next to him.

The result was not comfortable as far as conversation went, for Doss and Margie both wished to talk to Warristoun all the time, and he showed almost too plainly that he did not want to talk to either of them. They demanded a history of his wanderings, a full account of what he had done from the time of his social disappearance down to the present moment. His answers, brief and sometimes less than polite, were *almost excusable* in view of their persistent pumping.



Suddenly, in the midst of what Doss was saying, he, looked across the table to Jacynth, and said, like a man determined to receive an answer:

"Where have you been this morning?"

She raised her eyes from her plate, and answered quite readily and composedly: "Right along Scudder Scar, and up to Ample Moss. Dad has an idea for reclaiming land there. He thinks he might get a dozen arable acres sheltered from the wind, and raise crops."

"Corn?" asked Warristoun eagerly, looking at his agent.

Pennant shook his head. "Too high up the Dale," said he, "but there are several things we might try."

"I rode right up Goldborough Sack," said Jass, with a sudden smile, turning to her sister. "The wind at the top was enough to blow one's hair off. In fact, I think dad *has* lost a little, don't you? Oh, it was grand! We could see all the lakes. The top one—the reservoir, you know—had great waves on it, leaping and breaking! And just below it was Reedymere, almost blotted out in mist. A cloud came drifting over us, shaped like a weeping willow, with a rainbow hanging in its skirts; and under the arch of it I could see a glimpse of sunshine, and our own lake lying there like an enchanted valley."

"When you say our own lake, I suppose you mean mine," observed Warristoun. "Which of my horses were you exercising, if I may ask?"

She stopped short to stare at him. "*Your* horses?" she repeated, thinking of Hector's description of his flinty eyes.

"It was the first colt sired by Black Prince," began Pennant. Then he stopped himself with a jerk and coloured.

*An odd quiver* passed across the roughly-cut, blunt

features of Warristoun; and Jacynth suddenly guessed that Black Prince must have been the horse which he went to buy in Bircastle market on the day of his brother's murder.

"Ah, that's interesting," he said, in a carefully expressionless voice. "Shaped well, has he?"

"There were three others, but the Government has commandeered almost everything," said the agent with a sigh. "However, Joyce managed to keep this one up there, out at grass. He carries a lady well, and I think you could get a nice sum for him."

"Anything you could mount me on?"

"You can have Black Prince himself. I usually ride him, but if you like to try him I could have Rufus—the one I usually drive."

"Better let me have the tame one—Rufus, I mean," was the answer, with a smile. "I'm sure Matron would tell you I must be careful. Did I tell you I'm getting my discharge in a few days? His Majesty has done with me. There's a little place in my ankle that won't heal. Otherwise I'm all right. If it wasn't for the risk of the thing going septic, I'd be back in the trenches to-morrow."

This being the first piece of information he had vouchsafed about himself, there was much to be said concerning it, and the subject lasted till the succession of courses Doss had thought necessary was complete. They then left the two men to smoke, and Jacynth went upstairs to change. Once up, she did not go down again, though in a very few minutes the squire and his agent were to be seen upon the lawn drinking coffee. They soon, however, retired to the office, and profound quiet reigned over the house. The girls remained fixed upon the lawn, in hopes that the guest might come out to tea if suitably invoked. But he must have left *by the front door*, for they saw him no more.

They would have been surprised had they peeped into Jacynth's room; for they would have seen her on her knees, her face hidden, her shoulders quivering with the ardour of her petition. . . .

The warm sunshine now flooding the Dale, the afternoon peace, the faint sounds from below of maids singing, a tap running, the clink of teacups . . . the rumble of wheels from the road, the sound of Mrs. Grice's well-known voice calling across the hedge . . . it all seemed so everyday, so indestructible. It was not thinkable that the whole future of the household hung upon the will of one man—and such a man!

All that morning she had hoped for a confidence of some kind from her father; but none came. He had not even alluded to the expected guest until they were dismounting at the gate, when he remarked that they were within an inch of being late, but Doss would forgive them if the young man were punctual.

She noticed once that in speaking of a projected improvement upon the estate, he had said "after my time."

He expected dismissal. But on what grounds? Not for mismanagement of the property, for she could see that he prided himself upon its condition.

Now, as she listened with breath held, she could hear the two voices rising and falling in the room below; never loud nor quarrelsome. She would have sacrificed a week of her precious leave to know what was passing beneath her.

At last she could bear it no longer. She had to escape from the unbearable strain. Flinging on a hat, and seeing Doss and Margie still out upon the lawn, she tiptoed down the passage to the kitchen and let herself out by the back door, going for a lonely walk from which she did not return until the visitor had *gone*.



At dinner that night Pennant was silent, but his manner was more grave than depressed. He was evidently much preoccupied by his own thoughts, and the impression she received, after watching him covertly for half an hour, was that he was puzzled. Something, she thought, must have worked out contrary to his expectations. But he said not a word on the subject upon which all his and all her thoughts were fixed.

The other two girls were never sensible of a mental atmosphere. They were in high spirits, for what with Lady Monkland's call and the squire dropping in to lunch, they felt that they were doing well.

"Kitty Grice said she wished she might ever be able to do a little affair like our party last night in the same style," vaunted Doss. "She says we do it better far than anybody else in Estondale. By the bye, Jass, there's a new visitor up at the Grange, did you know? That Miss Bellairs that you said was V.A.D. under you at Mauby. She is a beauty, too! The carriage stopped just opposite this house for her ladyship to speak to the rector's wife, who was coming out of Mrs. Hawke's. So we got a good view. Fancy, father, did you know that Jass was ordering about a lord's daughter at Mauby?"

"Eh? Well, what of it?" he asked. He could not bring his mind to bear upon the subject.

Jass chimed in, to prevent their badgering him.

"Yes, she is handsome, isn't she? Like one of the celebrated beauties in romance or history. There is something statuesque about her. Something fine."

"You like her?"

"No, I don't like her at all. Her mind is as small as her face is classical," replied Jacynth. "But for all *that*, she makes me feel as a mongrel might in the

company of a greyhound——" she sought for a word and added—"makes me feel nondescript."

"Nondescript? What do you mean?" They did not understand.

"Oh, I don't know. As if I had no style of my own, no definite line. She seems to be all of one piece in some mysterious way. Her clothes and her movements, all she says or does, are just part of her—just right."

"Oh," groaned Margie, "what I'd give to be like that! Never to have chilblains nor a red nose, nor get scorched by the sun! I declare half my pleasure last night was spoilt by *this*." She pointed ruefully to the V-shaped patch of bright red upon her neck, caused by wearing blouses open at the throat.

Jass smiled. "No, Adela would never let the sun scorch her, nor the cold nip her," said she. "I dare say she has to give up a good deal in order to achieve the effect. But a clever maid is half the battle, you know."

"Do you know, Jass," said Margie consideringly, "I always think you look as if *you* had a maid. I said to Doss, the first night you came: She's no beauty, but she has such a *finished* look."

"Like her mother," said Pennant suddenly. His plunge into the talk took them all by surprise. "When my wife ran away with me," he went on, "she had never so much as put on her own stockings in her life. I—I did it for her. But always, maid or no maid, she had that air of being so well turned out, same as your little sister has. I'll tell you what it is that gives it, girls. It's blood. Only that." He turned quite fiercely to Jacynth. "Don't let me hear you call yourself a mongrel," he said. "You're your mother over again, thank the good Lord that made you so. . . . Yes, *I put on her stockings* for her, the morning after we



were married. Her little feet were all pinky white, like apple-blossom. She was never meant to rough it—any more than Jass is."

"Why, dad," said Jacynth, touched, yet amused, "don't say that! I think I've shown you I can rough it all right! I'm as strong as a little pony! Ah, my old dad, that was your gift! My mother may have given me her features, but you gave me your health and strength!"

He smiled wistfully. "Thank you, lass. I like to think that may be so," he said; and rising abruptly, went into his office, and they saw him no more that evening.



## CHAPTER XI

### A LONELY FARM

NEXT dawn ushered in a vivid day, with rollicking breeze and brilliant sunshine.

The small white clouds, like blobs of cotton-wool, all fleecy at the edges, passed over the landscape, dappling the purple moors. Even Mickle Fell had no vapours about his head, but heaved a clear-cut line against the vivid blue.

The horses came round at nine o'clock, and Jacynth was in the saddle soon after, riding off with her father, and conscious of a lurking persuasion that nothing could be so very wrong, after all, on such a morning.

She had passed a disturbed night, and had once or twice thought that she could hear her father pacing his room across the passage. His mood this morning held still that air of wonder, suspense, or doubt which she had remarked in it the previous evening.

She said no word on any such subject. That she had before her a day of riding—a day moreover of warm blue weather—was joy enough.

They took the road which led them up through the Estongarth woods past the main entrance of the Place; and as they approached the lodge and came in sight of the big white board proclaiming that this was the Tenth Mickleshire General Hospital, she saw that a blue uniformed soldier was awaiting them, mounted upon Rufus; and for the first time noticed that her father had a different mount.

*Warristoun* saluted with a smile as they rode up.



"Good morning, Miss Pennant! Good to feel a beast between my legs once more. Matron fairly got the wind up about my riding at all, but I pointed out that, after all, if George has done with me, it is nobody's concern but my own, even if I am a bit imprudent. She saw the point, after a while, and here we are. Now, Pennant, going to show me the bit of ground you think might be drained and cultivated?"

"That's the idea, I believe, sir."

"Then off we go. How about riding up Goldborough Stack, Miss Pennant? I want to see a cloud with a rainbow in its skirts, such as you were describing yesterday."

As usual, Jass found it hard to keep the hostility out of her voice. "There are no mists or clouds to-day," she replied shortly, knowing that she was glad to be able to contradict. "And Rufus found it a pull. He mustn't go again to-day."

"All right. We'll postpone it until we get the right weather," he replied, unmoved.

She knew that her father was listening eagerly, hoping that she would make some effort to placate the tyrant. She wanted to help, she was really anxious to do her best; but the man vexed her in a way she could not explain. It was as though he had always in his mind the knowledge that, well-conducted though she appeared, she could yet philander by a lake in the moonlight . . . he had caught her in the act . . . would magnanimously refrain from telling tales . . . but let her remember that *he knew*. He had a habit of contemplating her with lips pursed up ready for a whistle which was always silent—with a searching look in the eyes which Hector had so aptly described as flinty. It worried her. She detested the idea of being civil to anybody because of some hold, real or fancied, *which they might* have over her. The fact



that her father was in this man's employment irritated her like a sore.

They reached a cross-roads before long, and Warristoun turned Rufus into the left-hand lane.

"Not that way," said Pennant sharply. "The upper road is better surface."

"Never mind that. I've a fancy to go this way, and have a look at the waterfall."

Pennant submitted, with a tightening of the lips, and they followed the lane, which shortly brought them out upon the moor, along the side of a rapid brook, running in a deep gully. Warristoun rode ahead and Jacynth, contemplating his broad shoulders, thought there was obstinacy even in the set of his ears, flat against the sides of his square head. Suddenly he pulled up Rufus and uttered a cry of surprise; then, looking back, called to his agent:

"I say, what's this? What's become of the Ring Hanger?"

Pennant passed his tongue over dry lips. "It's been sold, sir. The Government made urgent requisition, and they were giving such prices for timber——"

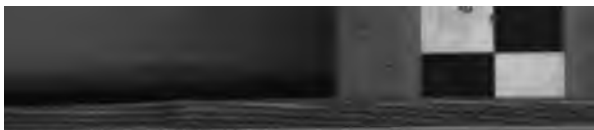
"No need to apologise. It was the right thing to do. But curiously enough, I thought you told me yesterday that we had made no sales of timber?"

"You must have misunderstood me. I meant recently. This was sold two years ago."

They were now ranged side by side, gazing down over the rough grassy edge into the tumbling beck far below. All down the steep declivity were the stumps of trees, and a few withered boughs lay derelict here and there.

"Seems a pity," said the owner at last, addressing himself to the girl. "It was such a jolly little Hanger, wasn't it?"

*"I never saw it."*



"Ah, no, I was forgetting. Well, it was a topping place. Guy and I used to come here for wild raspberries when we were little chaps. I declare I believe there are some down there now."

"Wild raspberries in August!"

"They're seldom ripe much before." He flung himself to the ground, handing his reins to her. "Catch! I'll go and gather you a leaf full."

He plunged down, taking a track evidently known from of old among the massacred innocents. Presently his voice was heard from below.

"I say, the flies down here are what our chaps call something chronic. But the fruit! Don't you want to come down and gather? Ah, well, I suppose it wouldn't be worth while your dismounting, as you have a substitute to face the briars! You see, I don't mind tearing my jeans, as George pays the bill." Silence for a while, and then, from sheer force of habit, he struck up:

"Oh, my old man's a fireman!"

The strains broke off abruptly.

"I forgot!" he shouted. "Lady doesn't like that song. Here's another one—afraid it's about a member of the Fire Brigade, though!" He began again to sing, words being inaudible, until he began to reascend the slope with a leaf of wild rhubarb cupped in his hand:

" . . . So he went west last Monday night,  
And where he is we don't know quite,  
But wherever he is, he'll be all right—  
Because he puts out fires!"

Something in the complete gravity of Jacynth's face as he came in sight of it made him suddenly silent. He brought *her* a delicious dessert of wild raspberries.

and she made her thanks as cordial as she could. He stood gazing out over his property, his lips set in their silent whistle while she ate, but at last he remarked:

"Well, to tell the truth, I'm rather bucked about this little Hanger's untimely fate. It ought to mean at least a thou. in my pocket, eh, Pennant?"

"About that, I think it was."

"Well, now we'll go on. I want to ride past the bit of the Eston Hag where all the peat is. Since they're going to ration fuel this winter, there's another little gold mine there, eh, Pennant?"

The agent cleared his throat. "It's being worked," said he. "I hope to show a profit on it."

"What price the profiteers?" cried Warristoun ironically. "Fancy the poor British land-owner getting a bit of his own back! Think of an estate in England having something on it that can be sold at a profit! Makes one giddy, eh, Pennant?"

"It's strange indeed, sir."

"Every head of live-stock, every egg and pat of butter—even every sod of peat—having a real appreciable value! Shall we go and look at the peat-cutting, eh?"

"They're not at work to-day. All on the harvest," muttered Pennant, looking down at the reins in his hand. "And if you want to ride all round the Ample Moss, we have no time to spare."

"Right. On you go. By the way, I daresay some of our fellows would give some help in the Dale with getting in the hay, if you want it."

"I think in the high farms they might be very glad, sir. This sun and wind will dry their hay rarely."

"It doesn't seem possible to be carrying hay now," mused Jacynth.

"Oh, you don't know Estondale. We sometimes carry hay in November. That's why the little gentlemen in the Government, who have left their classics to



come and take an interest in the productiveness of their country, have set us ignorant chaps to plough our acres and raise wheat."

Pennant made no response to the squire's gallant efforts at conversation. His silence lay heavy on the party. When they arrived at Ample Moss, however, he began to shake off his abstraction. This was his own subject, and he understood it. The two men walked their horses round and round, immersed in talk so technical that Jacynth grew considerably bored. She had no notion what was meant by land being "gripped," nor why a dressing of some kind of lime should turn heathery bog into fertile ground. What did they mean exactly by land having been "ploughed to death"? and why were some pastures referred to as being "in good heart"? Presently Warristoun turned to her, flashed a glance and said sharply:

"I say, we've nearly done. Would you ride over to the Farm there—where you see the chimneys over the trees—and tell Mrs. Joyce we shall be up in half an hour? I wrote last night to ask her to have something for us to eat."

She was glad to comply, and rode away alone across the moor, to what she thought the loneliest human habitation she had ever seen.

A rocky bluff sheltered it from the north wind, and a few trees had been planted and had struggled to maturity on the south-west. But for these, the grey stone house stood exposed to all the force of the tempests which often roll over the hills while the valleys below are in sunshine.

In a little enclosure at the front a pathetic attempt at a flower garden had been made. Against the south wall a climbing Gloire de Dijon fought for its life, and even succeeded in blooming.

*Mrs. Joyce ran out at the sound of the horse-hoofs in*

the yard. She was a young woman, and comely, and seemed quite excited. Was it really true that the squire himself was come back home? That he was actually on his way to see her?

She led Jacynth into the kitchen, where a fine ham, boiling for their repast, made a scent delicious to the hungry. As she laid the table, the farmer's wife talked with all the volubility of a woman who seldom has a listener. For the first time in living memory, so she said, the value of farm produce was enough to make farming worth while.

Not only were they able to put away a bit, but they got twice as much interest for it as they did before the war. So that, although the price of groceries and boots was "crool," they would feel that after the war they could have a bit to start with.

In a few minutes the husband entered. This Jacynth rightly guessed to be Joyce the gamekeeper, who had given evidence at the famous inquest. He impressed her favourably, being tall and well set up, with frank eyes. When the two gentlemen joined them, she noted the fervour of the greeting which passed between Warristoun and the ex-keeper. Joyce was, however, constrained to express his hearty disapproval of the sight of his master garbed as a private. He remarked, not in fun, but with extreme severity, that it was "just a bit of squire's deviltry"—which criticism did not appear to offend Warristoun at all.

There were two nice little children, aged about three years and eighteen months respectively, and Jacynth played with these while their mother spread the cloth, and the three men talked. Jacynth was not too much occupied to listen to their conversation, and it struck her that Joyce's feeling to her father was not altogether friendly.

"*Been through Gatesgarth yet, squire?*" was one of



his questions: and, upon Warristoun's replying that he had not—

"Well, you'll say there's been free handling there. Eh, man, but it seems a pity to cart away all them fine trees."

"Government wanted 'em, Joyce; and then—think of my bank balance," was the prompt reply given. Jacynth felt an impulse of gratitude, as she heard it. Her conviction was that Warristoun was by no means satisfied with his agent; but in face of criticism he was not going to give him away. "We'll be able to put in all kinds of improvements with our war profits, eh, Pennant?"

Pennant muttered something meant for an assent; and added defensively: "There has been no drastic work. The clump by Tarling Beck was cut, because it was mostly ash, and that was what they wanted; and of course that shows. But——"

"We'll ride home that way," cut in Warristoun. "Has Miss Pennant seen Gatesgarth?"

Jacynth looked up in wonder, all that she had heard of the fatal wood rising to her memory. Her thought was probably mirrored in her eyes, for he answered as though she had spoken:

"I want to show you the place where they found my brother, dead," said he quite simply. "Mrs. Joyce—do you know that I came upon Miss Pennant in the churchyard, caring for Captain Warristoun's grave?"

"Did you know?" said Mrs. Joyce, with a new kindness in her tone; and Joyce turned his steady blue eyes upon the girl as though he saw her for the first time. "Ah," said he, "that was a black day for the Dale. I'd give pretty much all I've got, to know the rights of it. I suppose those detectives have found out nothing all this time, squire?"

"Not *much*." Warristoun spoke with an impatient

sigh, in the act of rising and setting a chair to table for Jacynth, since Mrs. Joyce had now dished up dinner. "The war stopped it all; and now, after so long, I don't see the slightest chance of tracking down anybody."

Joyce growled like an angry dog, looking at his master with a kind of affectionate rage. He began to mutter something in which could be heard the opinion that his master had been too content to leave things as they were; but was cut short sharply with a—

"Hold your tongue, Joyce. There are not many people in the Dale who ever suspicioned me for a moment."

"You, indeed!" burst out Mrs. Joyce, flushing indignantly. "As well say that I might put an end to Joyce here——"

"A good deal better," declared her husband with a gay relish. "I often wonder as I trusts myself oop here along o' you."

"Finding it too lonely, are you? What did I tell you?" asked the master with a twinkle.

"The young couple looked each other in the eyes with a steady trust that was good to see. "We're all right," said Joyce heartily, "and by next year we'll have anoother hoondred ship on the land, after this year's prices."

Warristoun turned to Jacynth. "Her father wouldn't let her marry a man who hadn't a farm of his own," said he, "so I gave 'em this. The bother of it is that I don't like to give away the freehold, because this old spot is, I am told, the place where the Warristouns began. My family is known to have inhabited some kind of a farm on this site at the Domesday Survey; but we probably started in a cave there is out there, under the cliff edge, where there are said to be signs of prehistoric settlement. We lived up here until the

fifteenth century, by which time we had so successfully looted all our neighbours that we descended to the lakeside and built ourselves a goodly dwelling with our plunder. Some of it is still there, built into the present Place."

This information was interesting to Jacynth, who liked folk-lore; and by the end of the meal she was talking to the squire so placably that her father's brow lightened a little, though he was still quite unlike himself as she knew him.

When they rose from table, Mrs. Joyce took the girl out to look at the cave. It was hardly more than a great gaping mouth, or horizontal cleft, though it had a deep throat, receding some way into the hill. Mrs. Joyce with pride related that the antiquarian gentlemen had been to see it, and said it showed signs of having been artificially enlarged. The sides had probably been filled in with stone walls, now knocked down. The black-faced mountain sheep were lying in its shadow.

Pennant was in the yard as they returned, fidgeting to be off. But Mrs. Joyce begged him to go and look at her calves, and he went round to the stables with her, while Jacynth slowly returned to the farm kitchen to collect her whip and gloves. Just within the door stood a high, solid leather screen, and as she entered she became aware that her shoe-string needed retying. She stooped to perform the operation in the privacy thus afforded, and heard some words pass between the squire and the ex-keeper.

"By the way, sir, ever hear any more of that chap Daw Binny?"

"Daw Binny?" repeated the squire blankly.

"That French shooover of Miss Bellairs."

"Oh—ah! D'Aubigny—of course." Pause. "I



have heard nothing since the war began. He has, of course, been fighting for his country."

"Ah," said Joyce in a meditative voice. "I'd have like to put a few questions to him, I would. Precious nigh he come to queering our pitch altogether, with his fancy tale."

"Come, Joyce, none of that! For aught we know, the man spoke the cold truth." There was a sound as if Warristoun pushed back his chair and rose; and Jacynth, fearing to be caught, whisked out into the sunny yard.

*"That French chauffeur of Miss Bellairs?"*

Her father had expressed the opinion that the crime might have some connection with France. What had he meant? What did he know?

As they all rode out of the yard ten minutes later, she turned to look back at Mrs. Joyce, with her white-headed youngsters either side of her; and made almost the first spontaneous remark she had made to Warristoun.

"Doesn't the loneliness seem to you downright appalling?"

"It's pretty bad. Not so much this time of year, as they all go round harvesting to one another's farms. But in the winter, for weeks at a time, they see nobody but themselves."

"It helps me to realise the truth of what Captain Monkland said," she went on thoughtfully. "He said the dwellers in the Dale are left, all winter, to stew in their own juice, and that it is no wonder if they——" She hesitated and pulled herself up, realising suddenly the decidedly uncomplimentary character of Hector's comment.

"If they do what?" asked Warristoun, with that edge in his voice which he seemed to acquire when



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speaking of or to Captain Monkland. "Do finish. I should like the whole of his valuable reflection."

"He meant that there is excuse if the Dalesmen are eccentric, or—or one-idea'd."

"He's a profound thinker," was the contemptuous rejoinder; and she found that her maladroit mention of Hector's name had put a premature stop to their first conversation.



## CHAPTER XII

### IN GATESGARTH WOOD

THE gay breeze of the morning flagged as the sun passed his meridian. The Dale lay golden in the afternoon, drowsing in the unwonted heat. From Mannadale direction one could hear the guns, announcing that the men were shooting over the moor.

Gatesgarth wood clothes the lovely banks of the Gaitha, a considerable tributary of the Tees. Higher, swells of moor girdle it about, so that it is unusually sheltered; and it is here that the Estongarth children used always to come to seek the earliest primroses; until, a few years ago, the doom fell, and it was thereafter shunned by all save those who had business there.

The combined result of this abandonment and of the reduced labour on the estate, owing to the war, was to choke up the alleys and green ways, and to fling rotting saplings across the tracks. The wild rhubarb exhaled its musky fragrance rankly in the damp hollows, and the bells of the deadly bindweed, called in the south the Devil's rope, wreathed all about the roots of the trees and clotted the undergrowth.

The riders dismounted near the entrance of the wood, and tethered their horses, proceeding on foot to thread the mazes of the all but obliterated paths. "It's enough to make even me lose my way," muttered Warristoun, "so many of the old landmarks gone, and the place so unkempt."

It was with some difficulty that they reached at last the place he sought, and heard the rush of the water as



it shot down a series of rock shelves, forming a cascade which, although in miniature, was of singular beauty.

Ancient yew-trees overarched the walk by which they approached, and the green twilight was lit by the bells of countless tall campanulas of the most delicate shade of lavender blue.

Just beyond, the beauty had been violated and the whole effect spoiled by the entire destruction of a larch plantation. Many of the trees lay still uncleared along the ground.

As they came upon this, Jacynth for the first time saw Warristoun angry. His face darkened, his flint eyes shot sparks as if in contact with steel. He turned aside with her father, and spoke to him in a tone she had not hitherto heard Warristoun use. It appeared that he had given orders for this particular spot to be left untouched. His agent contended that the war had altered everything. Jacynth wandered away, to avoid the humiliation of hearing him excuse himself; but she could not help catching fragments—"Can only say how much I regret having acted in a way you dislike . . . was left in a very difficult position . . . own that I thought you could not have survived, or you would have sent some message. . . ."

She hastened out of earshot of such words, and presently sat down upon a natural seat, formed of the bare roots of a vigorous old beech which grew at the water's edge, and whose trunk formed a comfortable back. Taking off her hat she leaned back luxuriously, hearkening the musical rush of the water dripping from stair to stair. This, she supposed, must be quite close to the spot where Guy's body was found. Why was the squire so intensely annoyed at seeing the trees cut down? Was it merely a matter of sentiment? Or had he some other reason? Had he cause to know that something, some silent witness which might form a clue



to the secret of the crime, had been flung away into the brake and might come to light if disturbed?

The bold conjecture leaped into her mind. She had been profoundly influenced by Hector Monkland's certainty that this man with whom she had been riding had been the author of the manslaughter. She pondered the words she had overheard at High Crag. Evidently Joyce and his master shared some secret knowledge. The ex-keeper had remarked that the French chauffeur, by his evidence, had very nearly queered the pitch. But his evidence had been in their favour? The suggestion was that Monkland was right, and that the man's statement had been fabricated to meet the case.

She could make no sense of the matter, because her intelligence pointed out that, if her father had by some means come by the truth, the result of such knowledge must be to put Warristoun in his power rather than *vice versa*.

The doubts in her mind, and her vague resentment and distaste, were probably to be read in her expression as she watched Warristoun slouching towards her in his faded, baggy blue jeans; for he surveyed her with that watchful, intently speculative glance, coupled with the silent whistle.

"I don't know if you're aware of it," he said, more gently than she had ever heard him speak, "but you are sitting on the exact spot—where Guy sat to eat his last meal. Don't get up. There's no reason why you shouldn't sit there. Don't look as if it were an accursed spot."

The words caused her to check her involuntary shudder and movement to rise. He seated himself near, upon another of the convenient ledges formed by the writhing roots, and filled in with copper-coloured dry leaves. His expression was that of a man whose thoughts are miles away, his eyes were straining into



distance. She felt as if she followed the current of his thought.

"They think he was attacked unawares?" she asked, under her breath.

"Knocked on the head from behind. As you hear, the water talks so loud, anybody might creep up unheard. He was struck with violence, and when he was helpless the murderer picked up his gun and finished the job." He spoke quite steadily, but she saw the sweat bead itself upon his forehead, just below the growth of thick, almost bristling dust-coloured hair. He took out his handkerchief—oddly white and fine for the pocket of a private soldier—and passed it across his brow; then started to his feet. "By Jove, I'm sorry those larches have been cut," he muttered, moving on a little.

Some impulse to sympathise—deep, obscure—made Jacynth rise also and approach him. She stood close to him and was conscious of the silent vibration of feeling strongly roped in. There was a dumb appeal in the eyes he turned upon her, while his lips uttered the first thing he thought of which had no bearing upon his awful memories.

"There used to be a colony of blue jays," he remarked, lifting his harsh-cut face to the trees. "Wonder where they've all gone to."

She perceived that in visiting this spot at all he had overtaxed his strength; and to calm his nerves she talked to him quietly for a few minutes of birds and trees.

"Don't regret the larches too much. I wouldn't mourn for them as I would for beeches, for example."

"No, that's true. After all, the larch is a foreigner. Did you know he came to England for the first time in the middle of the eighteenth century? Done a good bit of peaceful penetration since then, hasn't he?"

They both smiled. "Beeches," said Jacynth, "are my special trees. They always seem more alive than any others."

"More alive?"

"Yes. They are like great pachyderms stretching themselves, the muscles all a-ripple under the glossy grey hide. Like elephants, or antediluvian monsters."

"My word, so they are." Again he contemplated her and she knew his whole thought was fixed upon her. "Queer girl, aren't you?" he murmured absently.

"Let us go down to the falls," said she, turning and walking on. Just before them was a hump in the path, hiding the next dip from their view. When they had gone far enough to see down into the hollow beyond, both stopped short in surprise. Down by the water, seated upon a fallen larch, elbows on knees and head hidden in her hands, was a lady.

Her attitude was that of deep grief, and at the sound of their voices and approach she leapt to her feet as if detected in something shameful. This feeling, as she recognised the advancing persons, changed to an exquisite confusion. She sprang forward with an inarticulate cry, then turned half away.

"Ran! Oh, Ran!" she wailed. It was Adela Bellairs.

Jacynth watched the meeting between the two with pardonable curiosity. They had been lovers once—in days when Ranulf was presumably not ridden by the perverse devil which now bestrode him. At any rate they had been engaged, and Jass had her sisters' word for the belief that, after Guy's death, Adela would most willingly have returned to her former love. Ranulf, however, had (so far as was known) departed without taking the trouble to ascertain this. Here was their first meeting, after long separation, marred only by the regrettable presence of number three. Her immediate impulse was to run away, leaving them to-

gether, but in a flash she realised that to do this without pausing to greet the lady would seem too marked. She went forward, therefore, admiring Adela's beauty from the bottom of her heart as she came near.

The long lashes of Miss Bellairs' pansy-brown eyes were pearled with tears. Her hair was the least bit—ever so becomingly—disarranged. Her summer frock was semi-transparent, misty, poetic. Her hat might have been worn by Flora in a Masque.

Her recognition of Jacynth was evidently most unwelcome, but she made as though to hide the fact. "Can it really be Nurse Pennant? Sister Pennant, I should say?" said she, giving a lifeless, perfunctory hand. "But how surprising!—As for you"—she turned her April smile upon Ranulf, and her throat heaved—"I had heard from Hector and Aunt Bessie that you have come to life again, so I am not quite so overthrown as I might have been. . . . But to find you *here!* . . ."

She laid both her hands in his, and seemed surprised at the despatch with which he returned them, so to speak, to her own keeping. The gentleman's demeanour evidently puzzled her, and it puzzled Jacynth too. He seemed to be considering Adela with the same weighing, appraising, speculative glance to which she was growing accustomed.

But, after a moment in which she probably readjusted her plan of campaign slightly, Miss Bellairs opened fire.

"Oh, Ran! Ran! Until I came here, I thought I had forgotten!"

"Then you were unwise to come," replied Ran bluntly.

"I didn't want to come. But—I couldn't help it." *Voice almost inaudible.* To this there was no response



at all, and she saw she was on the wrong tack hopelessly. Bracing herself, she touched her eyes with her handkerchief and turned to Jacynth with a brave smile. "I can talk to Mr. Warristoun later," she said. "This is our first meeting, and it's all so strange. Do tell me some news, and how it is that you are here. Was Mr. Pearson telling me that your father works on Mr. Warristoun's land?"

"I really cannot tell you what Mr. Pearson may have said. As a matter of fact, my father is Mr. Warristoun's agent."

"Just the same as your own father used to be, Addie," said the squire suddenly. "Before he came into his title. Managed Brecon's estates, didn't he? Or mismanaged 'em?"

For the first time Jacynth very nearly liked Ranulf, as he broke this serviceable lance in her defence. Adela laughed on a very quivering note.

"Oh, is that it? Thank you for telling me," said she. "So you are in the neighborhood of your old patient, Captain Monkland, Sister. Do you see much of him?"

"A good deal," replied Jacynth, smiling calmly. "I believe he is dining with us to-morrow. How do you think he is looking?"

"Oh, not well *at all!* Not at all! It is this high, bleak air, I expect. I am trying to persuade my aunt to send him to some warmer climate——"

"Can't be too warm to suit him," broke in Warristoun, "and the sooner he goes the better. I never had any use for Hector."

Adela turned her eyes upon him with a rapid, searching look, which suggested that some implication in this speech really startled her. Her eyes flashed from him to Jacynth. She uttered a little deprecating coo, lifting *her eyes to his face coaxingly*. "Ran, be good!"

"*Ran, be good!*" he mocked. "Miss Pennant, do you note the way to deal with me? Try it yourself. I shouldn't be half so refractory if you were to say to me: '*Ran, be good!*' "

"I'll say something much more to the point—good-bye!" said Jass, laughing, as she withdrew some paces up the path. "You will want to see Miss Bellairs home, I know; but please, Miss Bellairs, don't let him walk. He has his horse in the wood, and he has done more to-day than he is really equal to. So put on your best V.A.D. manner and insist upon his riding back."

With this, she turned and ran out of sight, the slope of the ground hiding her at once from view.

Adela, gazing after her, shrugged her shoulders daintily, and turned to Warristoun with amused eyes.

"Oh, *isn't* she a clever girl?" said she, as with lazy admiration. "I never saw a cleverer! How long has she been on leave? A fortnight? And she has got her foot in—right in—at Mannadale—and now with you too, dear Ran!"

"Hector's making a fool of himself about her, if you mean that," replied Warristoun after a pause. "But that's his little way."

"Oh, you don't understand. It's much more serious than that. He means to marry her. You needn't look incredulous. He does; and Aunt Bessie is so anxious to see him respectably *rangé*, that she is getting ready to swallow the Pennant family at one gulp. Ah, that does surprise you? I thought it would."

"It does indeed," was the reply. "Well, I think it must be stopped, don't you?"

"Oh, Ran!" she snatched at his words, "I thought I should have an ally in you. After all, you too are a member of the family. It matters both to you and to me! *We must let them know that we at least are not*

prepared to receive that demure minx as Hector's wife."

"I'm bothered if I do," he replied, with all the conviction she could desire.

"That's right! We'll manage it between us, won't we? My plan is the best. Persuade Aunt Bessie that this place is too cold for him, and she will move heaven and earth to have him sent away. But don't let us talk of that now! Come and find your horse and let me take you home. This place"—she glanced around her as if in fear—"is terrible, and I can't stay in it."

"Just so. Come on," said the young man elegantly, moving up the path. She overtook him, clasped her hands about his arm, whispered:

"Let me speak! . . . One word before we leave this haunted spot! Not a defence—only a plea . . . you have never let me speak . . . never! Let me explain."

Warristoun went suddenly white under the tan which made his naturally fair skin appear darker than his hair. "I can't talk about it," he said abruptly. "Come away!" Then, as she hung upon his arm and seemed as though she were determined to speak: "Look here—I *won't* talk about it, so that's flat! Come on, I tell you! This way—you don't want to meet the Pennants, do you? The old man's in the wood somewhere."



## CHAPTER XIII

### ADELA'S CHAUFFEUR

**I**T so chanced that when Miss Bellairs returned to the Grange that evening, everyone was still out in the garden, watching the final singles of a tennis tournament.

"My dear girl, where have you been?" cried Lady Monkland in some disapproval, looking up from her book as Adela appeared, crossing the lawn with dragging step, her dainty attire somewhat dishevelled. "Your shoes are crusted in mud—and you've torn your skirt! What on earth——"

"Oh, I've just been a ramble—farther than I intended, that's all, said the beauty peevishly, seating herself by the disarrayed tea-table and investigating pots and jugs.

"Why do you come home to tea at a quarter to seven? You'll find nothing there. Mr. Pearson, would you go into the house and ring for Parish——"

"No, no, Mr. Pearson," said Adela gently, lifting the never-failing appeal of her eyes to the infatuated young man. "I'm only thirsty, not hungry. Get me some lemonade—I see there is some in that jug."

"You're not the girl to go off on these ramble-scrambles," grumbled Aunt Bessie. "By the way, here's a letter for you—from the War Office, I think."

Adela took up the whitey-brown document and her face lightened a little. "It's about the car, I expect," said she, and opened it in some haste. "All right,

Aunt Bessie," said she, with far more vivacity in her tones. "I have the official sanction to run it."

"Excellent!" said Lady Monkland, evidently pleased. She proceeded to explain to Mr. Pearson. "My niece has a car, but of course it has been laid up since the war. She had a French chauffeur, who had to join up at once, and she would not let anybody else drive it. She also possessed a little old Ford which she took to France and used at the hospital at Mauby-en-Grève, but her beautiful Rolls-Royce has been idle all this time. To her surprise, about a fortnight ago, her chauffeur made his appearance at Mauby. He is invalided out of the army on account of a heart affection. So she thought she would apply to the Government for leave to bring car and man here, for the pleasure of our convalescents. And she has got it!"

"Good biz!" said Pearson cheerfully.

"I'll wire to d'Aubigny to bring it down at once. He's in London," said Adela thoughtfully. "He knows all this country, which is so fortunate. So now you gentlemen will be able to see the places of interest round about—Egliston Abbey——"

"Raby Castle," cut in her aunt.

"Mortham's Tower—Richmond—and so on," concluded Adela, drinking deep of lemonade. "Oh, me! How my feet do ache!"

"Silly girl, you have knocked yourself up," said Aunt Bessie with vexation. "This country's too rough for lonely walks."

"I wasn't alone all the time. I met Ranulf."

"Met Ranulf!" Lady Monkland's keen gaze glittered through her glasses. "Where did you meet him?"

"In Gatesgarth Wood."

"Gatesgarth Wood?" Her aunt stared in horrified *bewilderment*.



"Just by the spot where Guy was murdered."

"Bless me, Adela, how morbid of you both! Why do you wish to rake up horrors? Let the past sleep. . . . Well, and what had the young man to say for himself? Did he explain why he has been home for weeks without letting us know? Never coming near us!"

"His reason for not coming here may be easily guessed, surely," said Adela calmly, "since he is garbed in blue jeans and a red tie."

"Such nonsense! As if one studied such things after four years of war!"

"You may not, but Ranulf may. It is dimly possible he may feel an objection to saluting all your second lieutenants."

Her ladyship chuckled grimly. "I never thought of that. Well, I had better drive over to-morrow and call upon him. I want to let him know that we welcome him here. You see, if he had really been killed, we are his next-of-kin."

"No entail, is there?"

"No. I understand that was broken. But I am told there was an intestacy, so Sir John would come into everything. There are no other relations. It was high time Ranulf came home."

"I agree," said Adela. "He finds that his agent has been taking a great deal upon himself—cutting down and selling whole plantations."

"Serve Ranulf right. Why did he 'sham dead'? Pennant had to act as best he could."

"What's the discussion?" asked Hector, loafing up from the courts where he had been umpiring.

"Talking of the unspeakable Mr. Pennant," replied Adela. "I saw him this afternoon, as also his youngest daughter, *the fair nurse*. I came upon her wandering

with Ranulf. She looks rather nice in riding kit. I was surprised."

"Surprised that Miss Pennant looked nice, or surprised to find her with Ranulf?" asked Hector with a growl in his voice.

After a slight hesitation—"Both," smiled Adela. "My dear Hector, I must remark again as I did yesterday, you have made no progress at all since you got to England. When I last saw you at Mauby you were better and stronger than you look now. I told you this northern air would be too cold for you."

"What utter tosh you do unload, Adela," was Hector's cousinly comment on this; and he returned at once to the previous subject.

"Where did you see the Pennants? What were they doing?"

"I gathered that they are conducting the owner over the entire estate." Miss Bellairs handed her empty glass to the attentive Pearson; and he carried it off to replace it upon the distant table whence he had brought it for her. When he had taken a few paces she went on, with dropped voice: "Be careful, Hector! If the young lady thinks she can catch Ranulf, your chance will be gone, won't it?"

"You have the vulgarest mind of any woman of my acquaintance," said Hector bitterly.

"Hector, how dare you!"

"How dare *you*!" His voice shook with rage.

"Aunt Bessie!"

"Don't try to draw me in, Addie. If you trail your coat, you musn't be surprised to have it stepped upon," replied Lady Monkland with an air of displeasure. At the moment the dressing-bell rang, and the irate beauty rose and moved towards the house, engulfed in a wave of admiring young men returning from the tennis



courts. Hector flung himself down in the next chair to his aunt's, muttering:

"Adela is turning into a regular virago. Why the deuce doesn't she get married? 'Unkist, unkind,' is a very true saying.

"Well, I hope we may make up things between her and Ranulf. You may think she has queer taste, but she does care for him. When I spoke to her the news of his being alive she all but fainted."

"If that's so, her offensive remarks are no doubt prompted by a healthy and thriving jealousy," replied Hector, relieved. "Thank the powers it isn't me she's after, anyway."

"Her feeling for him has kept her single all this time. But suppose he does not respond? He has a queer temper, you know, and when she threw him over for Guy he swore he would never forgive her."

"Oh, that makes the result a cert.! Begin with a little hatred and the thing's as good as done. Has she fired her first guns this afternoon, do you think?"

"Yes; and I fear, judging by the frame of mind in which she has returned, that she has had a set-back," said Lady Monkland, smiling slightly. "But that is her own fault. A woman of the world, as she is, should have known better than to try to wring emotional capital out of the occasion, with another lady in the case."

Hector's brow grew thunderous. "How dare she couple Jacynth's name with his?"

Lady Monkland laid down her work and glanced at him over her glasses. "You are quite in earnest?" she asked.

He gave an uneasy glance and made as if to rise; but thinking better of the impulse, leaned back and said: "We've had this over before, haven't we?"

"*We have; and you gave me to understand that you*



had come to a decision. I accepted that; but your conduct has not been in harmony with your words. I am quite sure you know what I mean."

He sat up. "Nothing of the kind! What are you insinuating?"

"I am speaking of last night; not insinuating anything. If you cannot refrain—if you cannot curb yourself even when you are trying to win the love of a good, sweet girl, then——"

"Well?"

"What of the future? Is it to reflect the past?"

He threw away a cigar-end with irritation. "My dear aunt, don't be so pernickety. I know what I'm about. Last night was nothing."

"Pardon me, it was a great deal. It was a *step down*." She looked wistfully at his handsome face. "Seriously, might it not be better for you to take Adela's advice and go elsewhere for a while? At most Convalescent Hospitals you could not get it. I have spoken to Parish more seriously than I ever did in my life——"

"Look here, Aunt Bessie, 'nuff said. I'm not going away, for you or anybody else. All the same—I'm glad you spoke." He paused, and went on with telling effect, his fine eyes fixed upon her with coaxing tenderness: "I wanted to tell you how sorry I am about last night; and I also wanted you to know that it won't happen again."

There was a little silence. The rare tears gathered in Lady Monkland's eyes. She said no more. In her view, it was always a mistake to say too much. "Thank you, Hector," she murmured gently; and gathering up her work, she went indoors.

A few nights later, Warristoun dined at the Grange. *His discharge* had come and he wore mufti—his pre-



war dinner-jacket, somewhat tight under the arms.

After some correspondence with the War Office he was to be permitted to occupy two rooms in his own house upon condition of his acting as secretary to the matron.

Parish, as he helped him off with his light overcoat in the hall, expressed his pleasure at seeing him there once more.

"Terrible times, sir—terrible times! And in the Dale the terrible times begun before the war, didn't they? However, please God, we shall get on better now. We do seem to be giving the Huns what-for on the western front at last, don't we? I put it down to Fosh, don't you, sir?"

"I put it down to our Mickleshire lads, Parish. Look what the 62nd Division has been doing! And the 62nd is full of 'em."

"So it is, sir. My own eldest son, he's sergeant-major in his battalion."

The butler launched eagerly into anecdote, and the squire listened with interest by no means feigned. As the tale was proceeding, a door in the shadows at the back of the hall opened and closed softly and a man came forward, carrying some motoring wraps over his arm, evidently on his way to bestow them in the room near the front door where gentlemen's coats were hung.

He was small, well-knit and wiry, with a pale hatchet face lit by luminous dark eyes. When he saw Warristoun he stopped short, and his face expressed something which was unreadable, but might have been discomfort. It certainly was not welcome.

"Why—hallo!" said Warristoun in surprise. "Is that the chauffeur, d'Aubigny?"

He spoke in French, and the man replied stammeringly: "I salute *monsieur*. I had been informed that *monsieur* was missing."

Ranulf laughed. "Last time I saw you was in the coroner's court at Bircastle. You did me a service then, and though I sent you a message, I have never seen you since to thank you. Shake hands."

He made a step forward, with arm outstretched, but the Frenchman backed away. "Ah no, monsieur. It is not for me to shake your hand. I know my place. I did nothing for which thanks are due. I just told the truth."

An odd gleam flickered over Warristoun's features—which, owing perhaps to their irregularity, were certainly expressive.

"So!" said he ponderingly. "Well, as you please." Turning away, he handed his gloves to Parish, as though dismissing the man from his mind.

D'Aubigny looked distressed. He seemed to feel that he had been ungracious. "May I be allowed to felicitate monsieur upon having come through?" he asked in a low voice.

Warristoun knit his brows. "That may be a cause for felicitation—or it may not," he muttered, in English; and then as it seemed, he, like the other, repented an ungracious impulse, and added kindly: "You, too, have come through. How is it you are in England?"

"I am no longer fit for the army, monsieur. It is an affection of the heart. I can do no active work, so it is a piece of wonderful good fortune to return to the service of Mademoiselle Bellairs." He bowed nervously, and scurried off to hang up the pile of officers' coats which he bore upon his arm. He moved with haste, as though he feared a repetition of the squire's gratitude.

Ranulf stared musingly after him. "Odd thing, Parish! I was speaking of that chap the other day, only to Joyce. We were wondering where he was."

"He's a nice young man," said Parish approvingly.



"All of us that was here before the war was pleased to see him back."

"I suppose some of you have fallen out in France, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Our late chauffeur, a groom and two stable hands—poor Ashby that used always to lend Mr. Daw Binny his motor bike! Ah, sir, what a providential thing it was for you that Ashby had gone out that day and left the bike locked up, so that Daw Binny had to foot it all the way to Bircastle and back! I remember myself how hot he come in that day! Little did I think as how your life might perhaps hang upon his having walked."

"Indeed! 'And so Ashby's killed, you tell me?"

"Long ago, sir. Went West in '15, he did. One of the best chaps as ever stepped, he was."

"That's always the way. The best get taken, while I, who have done all that mortal man could do for best part of four years to stop a bullet—why, I roll up here, and disappoint Sir John and the captain, eh, Parish?"

"Never say such a thing, sir," replied Parish warmly. "Walk in, sir, and see the welcome you'll get!"

Warristoun shrugged his square shoulders and passed through the wide-flung door of the drawing-room with a shadow in his eyes. His mind was busy with a new thought.



## CHAPTER XIV

### HECTOR PAYS A CALL

**I** DO think you are a silly girl not to be coming with us," said Marjorie, hugging Jass good-humouredly.

The three girls stood in the sunny bow-window at Free Croft, awaiting the arrival of the village wagonette which was to drive the two elder Miss Pennants to a tennis party in a neighbouring village.

"You are dears, you always seem ready to take your superfluous sister about with you," said Jass, rubbing her cheek against Margie's. "But, you know, I must go out with dad—I must let him feel I'm at his disposal. It seems he really wants me; he has you two always, and I shall be going away so soon. If I can be with him what does a tennis party matter?"

"Well, I'm not so sure," replied Doss, drawing on her gloves. "Everybody is saying the war will soon be over now. Bulgaria is near the end, and Turkey is near the end—and when they go Germany will have to climb down."

"There is sure to be a batch of officers from the Grange there this afternoon," put in Margie. "Captain Monkland, very likely; and he will of course ask where you are. He says he is tired of going from place to place expecting to meet you—people will be saying that we try to keep you in the background, next!"

"Not likely. Everybody knows too well what a good sort you both are," cried Jass warmly.

"*Jass, did you know they have a swell car up at the*

Grange now? Miss Bellairs brought it, chauffeur and all, and they are going off, a big party, to Brough Hill Fair to-morrow! Pearson says things are much more go-ahead since Captain Monkland came home. They've got up a sweepstakes for the horse trials at the Fair, and Captain Gurdon's put me in, and Pearson's put Margie—for luck, they say?" confided Doss joyously.

"I suppose Mrs. Grice will be going to the Fair," said Jass.

"Oh, bless you, no! It isn't an affair for ladies! A bit of rough and tumble, but all the men turn out for it every year. And you see, if some of 'em do get a bit too happy, there's nobody to carry tales."

Jass wondered how both the girls could laugh so lightly at this sally. She was desperately anxious about her father, who always attended Brough Hill Fair; and she drifted off into reverie for a few minutes. When next she picked up the thread of the girls' gossip they were saying:

"Pearson says the captain and his cousin Adela don't hit it off a bit. Always squabbling. No chance at all of *that* being a match. In fact, they are all saying up there that Miss Bellairs means to make it up with Warristoun after all."

"Well, why not?" asked Jacynth. "I expect his uncertain temper and odd ways are all due to his having been crossed in love. And if the lady really preferred him all the time——"

"Oh, but, my *dear!*—after it all came out in court! After the coroner having it all over about jealousy being the motive for the crime! After what was said about Ranulf having done it."

"But nobody believed that?"

"I suppose not," said Doss slowly. "But that kind of mud sticks, you know. The point is, if he didn't do it, *who did?*"

"Well," said Jass, after a pause, "if they are in love with each other, they will care very little for popular opinion, I suppose. Miss Bellairs is so beautiful."

"Yes; what can a man do against a power like hers?" sighed poor Margie, acutely sensible that Pearson was one of the beauty's most devoted thralls. "Well—here comes Hebden at last—driving like a snail. Good-bye, Jass! If Captain Monkland's there I'll put your nose out of joint!"

They ran off laughing, and Jass sat down in the window to watch for her father. She followed with her eyes the lumbering vehicle and the bright frocks of its occupants as long as she could see them. What a good sort they were! Only—not her sort, alas! And yet she knew that the average man would be far more likely to fall in love with Margie than with herself. The rosy cheek, the good teeth, the ready smile and the sociable disposition are what for the average man constitute "a nice girl."

"I wish Mr. Pearson would propose," thought Jass, knowing well that to the "nice girl" one man is pretty much the same as another, the one proviso being that he shall actually propose to marry her. Mr. Pearson would have but to assert that, for him, Marjorie was the one girl in the world, for her to be perfectly certain that she felt the same about him. And the result would probably be satisfactory matrimony, with the usual tiffs, but a substantial faithfulness; and, if circumstances were easy, a considerable share of happiness.

She turned her mind from these reflections to think of her own anxieties. She had not seen Hector for some days, since she had been out constantly, riding over the land with her father, and with Warristoun most frequently completing the party. Her acquaintance with him had hung fire more and more since the day in *Gatesgarth Wood*. She had seen Adela's demeanour

on that occasion and felt that the man's mind must be wholly pre-occupied with his own future. Moreover, as the days went on, it had become increasingly evident that her father lay under the displeasure of the master of the property. Never a word did Pennant say to her, however; and she could not force his confidence. But his gloom deepened, and of an evening she could not arouse him from a kind of lethargy into which he seemed to have sunk, like a man in a dungeon awaiting sentence of execution—which sentence, for some unexplained reason, failed to arrive.

He was coming back that afternoon from a morning in the harvest-field, to fetch her in order that she might ride with him up the Dale to a farm beyond the head of the highest lake—the last farm he must visit before sending in the complete report he had been preparing.

Just as she was wondering what kept him, she saw Captain Monkland enter the gate, on foot.

The sight turned the current of her mind with a shock. Captain Monkland! He was coming, quite possibly, with a definite intention. What was she going to say to him? All at once she became aware that he, and the situation existing between them, had been forced into the background of her mind by the anxious preoccupations above mentioned.

She had been strongly attracted by him at Mauby, and had told herself that she would be able to reach a decision by observing how he bore himself towards her when he found that, in England, she occupied a lower social shelf than he did.

He had arrived, and his behaviour had been all that it should have been. He had brought her ladyship to call at once, secured a proper invitation for her, and shown himself pleased to accept the hospitality of *Free Croft*.



Could it be that now—he having proved his own sincerity so frankly—she, the agent's youngest daughter, was herself uncertain, unprepared with a definite answer to a definite question?

How had the situation changed? She could not tell. But she knew that her feeling with regard to him had undergone some subtle transformation since the moonlit evening by the lakeside. Some stain, however light, had been cast upon it. The bloom had been rubbed off. Surely a robust love could have taken no hurt from so slight a cause as the burst of vulgar derision which came at a critical moment from the soldiers by the lake? Yet she felt, somehow, that her idyll had been damaged or profaned.

The visitor was announced before she had proceeded any further down the windings of her thought.

"This is great luck, to find you at home alone," said he, with boyish pleasure. He was looking particularly nice—well-groomed, fresh and handsome. His eyes glowed with meaning as their hands met, and she almost felt as though they were—they must be—lovers.

"What have you been doing with yourself all these days?" he asked. "I've been calling here, and riding round the place in hopes of falling in with you, but all in vain."

"I've been too far afield—riding most days with father and Mr. Warristoun."

She was amazed to see his vexation.

"With Warristoun! What on earth do you want to ride with him for?"

"Father manages his property, you know. Naturally he wanted to go all over it after so long an absence; and as I am very fond of riding, and there was a mount for me, I have been going with them."



"I see. But when Adela met you, you were walking with him—alone in the wood."

Jacynth smiled. "So Miss Bellairs told you of our meeting? Yes, my father had stayed behind a moment, to look at some trees. We walked on ahead and found poor Miss Bellairs, all alone, come to grieve at the spot where her *fiancé* was murdered."

"I hope Ranulf consoled her? I believe my aunt thinks that will be a match. What do you think of the last of the Wild Warristouns?"

Something in his tone was so definitely hostile that she thought it undeserved. "His manners are the worst part of him," said she; and wondered why she said it.

"Oho? Is that your opinion? The gentleman has been at pains to obtain your good word?"

Jacynth actually laughed. "No, I could hardly say that. I am just the Bailiff's Daughter, you know—what does my good word matter?"

"And he's the squire's son, by George!" said Hector quickly. "Returned from the Crusades and all! How touching!"

"Isn't it? However, the rest of the ballad won't fit, since we had never met before he went away!"

"Or perhaps he might never have gone," mused Hector, contemplating her uneasily. "However—he did go; and I maintain that there are two points which need elucidation. Point one—why did he disappear? Point two—why has he come back again?"

"Why ask me these conundrums? I know nothing of Mr. Warristoun's comings or goings."

"Nor anybody else! Do you know, he told us the other evening that he was in England last year for three months with a wound—at a hospital in Liverpool, and then in a convalescent place somewhere in Scotland. Why couldn't he say so? Letting us all

suppose him dead! Even now he had been more than a fortnight in the place before we knew it."

"You must go on guessing—I can't answer."

"I'm a fool to waste precious moments in talking of him. But I do wish he would come to the point and give my cousin Adela something to think about that would keep her mind off me. Her latest idea is that I look ill and need change. She wants Aunt Bessie to get me transferred to Cornwall, or somewhere like that; an idea which must be stopped at all hazards."

"Why, wouldn't you like to go to Cornwall? I hear it is lovely there just now. I had a letter from a girl who was one of the nurses at Mauby, and she said——"

"Never mind what she said. I'm not going, and that's the end of it. There's only one person in this Dale who could get me to leave it just now, and you know who that is."

He rose, brought a chair to her side and sat down. His voice had changed—his eyes, his whole manner, warned her. She felt like a thing in a trap. It was coming, this question, upon the answer to which hung all her future. And she was not ready for it—was less ready than she would have been had it been put to her in the untidy garden at Mauby. Her impulse, finding herself unable to avert the crisis, was to rise and run away. She did actually spring to her feet. Her eyes, wild with a plea, met his and checked for a moment the words upon his tongue. And then she knew that she was saved for the moment, for the figure of Joe Pennant, mounted, crossed the window, and his voice was heard calling aloud for "Jass!"

"There's father," she breathed, and her lover uttered a choked and most pardonable expression of his feelings.

"Oh, Jacynth, this is awful! Can I never hope to



have ten minutes with you undisturbed? Have a little pity on me! Listen"—as the calling voice from without grew more imperious—"you must give me a time! You must! This is serious! It's—it's vital! Tomorrow's no good, because we are all going across the summit to Brough Hill Fair. But the day after—the day after you've got to meet me! On the moor under the How Cross, whatever the weather, between eleven and twelve! Will you? Don't you owe me that?"

She caught at the reprieve. Yes, she knew that she owed it to him. In her heart she supposed herself to be the victim of an attack of nerves—to be suffering from a fit of Victorian coyness from which she might expect to recover in due course. Then—having had time to face the thing—surely she could give him the answer he desired. She consented to his plan, and let him hold her two hands close folded in his as he said good-bye.

He came out of the door with her, and mounted her upon the horse her father was leading, ready saddled. This was the Ample Moss colt, now formally named Sir Douglas, in honour of the English Field-Marshal.

Pennant greeted the young man cordially. The gloom passed in part from his ravaged face at the sight of him. He glanced searchingly at his daughter, as if impatient for tidings, which were not, however, forthcoming.

"Pity you're not mounted, captain," said he, "you might have ridden with us. We're bound for the Lakehead Farm. My girl's seeing a bit of country. Well, good-morning to you. Friendly of you to look in upon us."

"Seems to be in earnest, lass," said he with a deep

sigh as they drew out of earshot. "He may not be perfect, but you could influence him."

"Do you know anything against him, dad?" asked she, a little tremulously.

He hesitated. "No, I don't," he said at last. "He hasn't been much in the Dale. Folks gave him the name of being unsteady; but this war has taught him better, I dare swear. Lionel, his cousin that was killed, and the Warristouns—they were a wild lot, all of 'em. But he'll settle down now, I'll warrant. Don't play fast and loose with him, Jass. Make your market while you can. Who knows what's coming?"



## CHAPTER XV

### HOME FROM THE FAIR

**T**HE morning of Brough Hill Fair dawned sunny and warm, but the grass was falling rapidly, and the farmers were prophesying the breaking of the drought.

In the almost universal absence of the males of the community, the village slept all day, dreaming in a languid ease.

Jacynth watched her father depart for the celebrated horse fair with mixed feelings. He had now completed the statistics for which the squire had asked, and had handed in his report. Upon the result of this, she divined, must hang the future of the family. Further than this she could only speculate; but she was convinced that for days past Pennant had been expecting the falling of a blow which had not fallen—the issue of some sentence which had not been promulgated. To-day's outing would turn the current of his thoughts, and keep him from the deadly brooding to which he was so prone.

But—and here was the point. There would be hard drinking all day—a late return at night. If Pennant were known to be drunk—incapably drunk as she knew from her sisters he had more than once been—the fact would almost certainly swing the balance against him in the eyes of Warristoun. That rumour had been silent she could not believe. The squire must have already heard reports of what was in most people's mouths. Should this day furnish him with proof

of the truth of such reports, what an excellent reason for dismissal!

Searching in her mind for some prop to steady him, she had caught at the plight of a neighbour, one Akroyd, whose only horse had gone lame; and had prompted Pennant to offer him a lift. Akroyd was a steady, quiet man, and she thought he would act as a deterrent. She had, it should be stated, made a gallant attempt to dissuade her father from going at all, putting it on the ground of his being out of sorts. But he had convinced her that he must put in an appearance. He had not missed a single year for the past quarter of a century; and his absence might be taken to indicate an unsatisfactory state of affairs between himself and Warristoun. This was an argument whose force she appreciated. So she ceased to urge him, and saw him depart with Mr. Akroyd, hoping for the best.

The groom, when he brought round the trap, informed the young ladies that the squire had wangled from Matron leave for a surprising number of Tommies to attend the Fair, and that he had provided vehicles for them all. A drag with four horses, packed with the Grange convalescents, presently whirled through the village. This was speedily followed by Adela's great Rolls-Royce, carrying Sir John and his nephew, accompanied by the Lord Lieutenant of the county and another great land-owner.

In order to mitigate the dullness of the forsaken village, the indefatigable Mrs. Grice had organised what she called a "hen-party"; and Jacynth, feeling that she was usually somewhat less than cordial to this lady, went thither with her sisters.

The weather broke between five and six, and there was a thunderstorm, with torrents of rain. Jacynth *thought of the wild sweep of the weather across the*



summit, and of how inviting the Duke's Head would be after a drenching. A couple of hours later the merry-makers began to return, many of them in wretched plight, having gone unprovided against rain. The storm passed, but left a steady downpour, which threatened to continue all night.

The three girls left Mrs. Grice's about eight o'clock. As they walked home down the village street the Grange drag drove through on its homeward way, and the lively young men insisted upon stopping to exchange greetings. They were in high spirits, and said they wouldn't have missed the fun for anything. As they dallied, the Rolls-Royce came gliding up behind. Sir John was seated in it alone, hunched in his seat with a scowling face. He called furiously to the driver of the drag not to loiter but to get the team back to their stables at once.

With shrugs and laughter the young men drove off and the girls ran home as fast as they could.

A cold supper awaited them, and when they had eaten they left the food on the table for their father; but the long hours ticked by, and he did not appear.

When Jacynth could no longer conceal her anxiety, she questioned her sisters as to where he was likely to be.

"Oh, he's at the Duke's Head, of course," said Doss without emotion. "I felt sure he would stop there, when I saw how wet it came on. He would be certain to go in to get dry and have a drink, and of course a lot of them would be there, and he would stay on; and then, you know, having once begun——"

"But I hoped Mr. Akroyd——" cried poor Jass.

"Mr. Akroyd? Oh, he came back long ago. I saw him pass while we were still at Kitty's. Mr. Safford gave him a lift home."

"Oh, if I could have given him a hint not to leave



dad," grieved Jass. "But how could I? You know I couldn't! . . ."

"Oh, well, let's hope he has the sense not to come at all," replied Doss. "I told him when last it happened that next time he had better stay where he was. Better than staggering all about the place."

"Ah," said Margie doubtfully, "but you see Jass kept on at him this morning, saying she should expect him home. He always listens to her, so I'm afraid, however tipsy he may be, he'll have a try to make his way back, remembering what she said."

Jacynth's heart sank low. This was true. Even in his muddled condition, Pennant would remember that he must make an effort to return; he would still be anxious not to disappoint her. Although she knew her sisters to be far from understanding all the danger of the situation, she yet wondered at the calm truth which they continued to discuss the way in which Miss Brett's elder niece arranged her hair.

After a while she slipped out of the room. They had lit a fire when the sudden change to autumnal cold made itself felt, and with their feet on the fender were cosily settled, and did not notice her disappearance.

Her mind was made up, and she changed into her military mackintosh hat and coat, and left the house quite noiselessly. There were two lady's bicycles in the stable, ready for use. She lit a lamp, took one of the machines, and was off. The rain was now very slight, not much more than a drizzle.

Her road was on the whole downhill, except where it crossed the river, and rose sharply on the further shore, in a Z-shaped bend, the bridge forming the middle section. She was on the watch for this, and negotiated it successfully, having to push her cycle up



the farther bank. But after this she ran down into Bircastle quite safely and with ease.

The bar portion of the hotel was closed when she arrived, and all the windows discreetly darkened; but slits of light showed around the blinds of the dining-room, and she knocked boldly.

"Good-evening," said she to the waiter who admitted her. "Will you please tell me if Mr. Pennant is here?"

The man hesitated. "Is it Miss Pennant?"

"Yes. I want to see my father. I have a message to give him."

He looked keenly at her, then said: "If you'll not mind waiting here a minute, miss, I'll call the master."

He hurried off, leaving her in the dark hall, lit by a glimmering gas jet, and smelling strongly of roast beef, beer and tobacco. Shouts and gusts of laughter reached her ears. Evidently the horse-dealers and farmers of the Dale were feasting and making merry in the old hostelry.

Presently the owner of the Duke's Head came hurrying along, and greeted her civilly.

"Good-evening, miss. I understand you want to see Mr. Pennant? He is here, and wants to go; but he doesn't seem very—ah'm—well—and we think he would be better here for the night."

"I think so too," said the girl hurriedly. "I came—I thought it would be best to tell him so. The weather is so bad—he had a cold this morning——"

"Safer where he is, miss," was the sympathetic reply. "But I doubt if we'll persuade him. He's set on leaving."

"Will you please tell him that I am here?" she asked bravely. "I think I can manage him."

*The Dalesman* looked more than doubtful, but he

went upon his errand, and had been but a minute or two gone before the door of the coffee-room was flung widely open, and Pennant came out, with a curious swing, seeming to throw himself against the opposite wall of the passage.

He put his hand to his forehead, drew himself upright, and then came towards her, walking almost steadily, with only the slightest sway in his motion. The landlord followed him.

"Well, my darling, what'r doing here—ur—urrith' rain?"

She turned scarlet, but smiled bravely, her eyes smarting with tears.

"I'm cycling home, dad," said she distinctly, "and I just looked in to say that I think, as your cold's so bad, you had better stay here till to-morrow morning. Mr. Bunce says he can put you up."

He laughed lightly. "Bunce is a fool," said he, speaking quite distinctly, "and do you suppose that I'm going to let you ride about in the dark—night of Brough Hill Fair—on your cycle—all alone? No, my beauty! You leave your cycle here—Bunce'll see to it—and you come home with me."

He spoke so decidedly, and so rationally, that she thought he could not be very far gone. She flashed a look at the landlord, who shook his head slightly, as though to say, "You can't move him." She tried again.

"Dad, I wish, to please me, that you would stay here; you know it is raining, and your cold was really bad——"

"They're bringing round the trap," he said solemnly. "We'll go home together, little woman. 'Twonce. Come along."

"Can you drive, miss?" asked Bunce in a low tone.

"Yes," replied Jass recklessly. She had driven



Rufus several times; and though secretly terrified of the dark night and the steep gradients, she was fairly sure the horse could be trusted on a road he knew so well. Would it be better to get her father home, at all risks? She almost thought it might. His staying at the Duke's Head all night must be known, whereas this idea offered the chance of getting him home as privately as possible.

She tried again, however. "Dad, listen to me. You had better stay here. Do you understand? You had—better—stay—here."

She laid her hands upon his shoulders to emphasise the words. He smiled at her with triumphant fondness. "My youngest daughter, Bunce. See how fond she is of her old dad? Was telling you about her. Bit of a thoroughbred, eh? Wasn't I right? She's going to make—good match. . . ."

She started visibly. "Nonsense, dad. Mr. Bunce doesn't want to hear that!" And suddenly panic drove her. It appeared that Pennant was in the babbling stage of intoxication, and she felt that at all costs she must take him away. What might he not say if she allowed him to go back to his boon companions? She turned piteously to Bunce. "I think he had better have his way," she said. "Ask them to bring round the trap."

"Yes, yes," said Pennant in a pleased voice. "I gave my word to my little girl. Not going to let her down. Not—going to—letterdown."

He was tipsy, but not so tipsy as she had feared. The cold air outside might sober him considerably. She felt sure that she was doing right in removing him, and most evidently the innkeeper was thankful to be rid of him.

She helped him into his raincoat, which was a matter of some difficulty, he all the time muttering that he

wasn't going to leave his little beauty to find her way home alone; and soon the wheels of the cart were heard, rumbling under the arch which pierced the front of the inn and led to the large courtyard behind, once part of the Castle stables. It was a relief to find that the rain had almost ceased to fall.

She was not prepared for the difficulty which the waiter and Bunce experienced in helping Pennant up to his place.

When this was accomplished, the landlord murmured a word in her ear.

"He pulled himself together, miss, when he saw you. But he's terribly full. You drive, missie—don't let him try. Maybe he'll doze off when you get going. But be sharp with him. Don't let him try no games."

So saying, he handed her the reins; and hardly had they moved from the door when she realised that she was not driving Rufus at all, but Black Prince, the fiery and self-willed.

'She was in for it now. At first she hoped that she was right and Bunce wrong as to the degree of Pennant's inebriety. But she soon began to realise that this was not so. The cart was a two-wheeler, but of the kind in which the two back passengers sit facing one another, as in a wagonette. She had, however, insisted upon having her father beside her, so that she might support him in case he were unable to sit up.

They set off, he making no slightest demur to the fact that she held the reins. This helped her to perceive the extent to which his brain was clouded. But her whole mind was at first so set upon the task of making Black Prince know that she was not to be trifled with, that she had little leisure for any other consideration. For the first mile or two the road was *wide and level*, and the steed, having twice crossed



the summit that day, was not greatly inclined to dispute the mastery with his driver.

Pennant talked incessantly, chiefly about the great match she was expected to make. She wondered whether he had been so far lost to himself as to bandy her name in the coffee-room with those men!

The cold, or the jolting, however, soon caused him to feel very ill, and he lapsed into silence, and then into distressful muttering. When they were about half-way home the rain began to pour heavily; and the thunder, which had never quite ceased, approached with startling swiftness. Presently the lightning was playing about their path, much to Black Prince's annoyance.

He started to be tiresome just as they were descending to the passage of the dreaded bridge. The rain was driving in Jass's face like whips, but her wrists were firm, and she thought all would have gone well but for an unforeseen complication.

Pennant, who had been groaning and trying to say something, suddenly seized her arm, jerking the reins and crying to her to stop. She was too much absorbed with her difficulties to understand what he wanted; she only knew—and tried to explain—that they could not stop until they were at the bottom of the hill. With the reins still in his hands, he leaned suddenly and violently over to his side of the cart, and vomited.

That just did it. Black Prince at the moment, shying from the lightning, swerved so that the off wheel grazed the wall at the angle by the bridge; and, the cart tipping suddenly, the hanging figure of the drunken man was shot out into the road.

There followed some awful moments, in which Jacyynth knew that Black Prince meant to bolt; and she had to manœuvre in the narrow roadway, so as not only to check *his* career, but also to keep *his* tramp.

ing hoofs from the prostrate form which she could not even see in the dark.

Despair keyed her up; her voice rang out, she felt her wrists like iron; and she succeeded in controlling the animal—having, it is to be presumed, a hereditary aptitude for handling horses.

As soon as she could, she got out of the cart, went to Black Prince's head, patted and soothed him, backed him and actually persuaded him to stand while she made the reins fast to a post.

Then she went and stooped over the muddy heap in the road, and the sobs came thick and fast as she asked herself what in all the wide world she could do? For, unless or until Pennant regained consciousness or the power of movement, she knew that it was absolutely out of the question for her to lift him into the cart.

He lay so still that for some long seconds she had the terrible idea that he was dead. But the stertorous breath reassured her. He was alive, but one side of his head was covered with blood and dirt, and he was altogether in a repulsive plight.

Fearing lest some belated farmer might drive over them both in the dark, she set herself to try and drag him to the side of the road, that she might prop him against the wall. She found it almost impossible to raise his shoulders so as to enable her to get a grip; and as she was in the act of struggling with him, she heard the approaching throb, throb of a motor cycle.

In a panic she sprang up, wrested one of the lamps from the cart, and waved it to and fro, that the oncoming traveller might realise that the lonely road was completely obstructed. At the same time she cried out, as loudly as she could; and soon had the relief of seeing the approach of the brilliant lamp slow down, and hearing the pulsing engine cease work.

Her relief was short-lived. A moment later, and



she knew that the crowning humiliation was accomplished. This was the result of her eager attempt to help! Far, far better had she let things alone! She had contrived her father's ruin as completely as though she had done so intentionally; for the voice that cried out to know what the matter was, was the voice of Ranulf Warristoun.

In another moment he had propped his machine against the wall and come up to where she stood, peering into her face. "Hallo! Hallo-o! Can this be my Lady Disdain?"

"Oh!" she choked, "for pity's sake! See here!" She turned the light of the lamp she held upon what lay on the ground.

She saw the man's face change as he glanced downward, and then keenly at her.

"I'm sorry! I wouldn't have started ragging if I had known."

"What am I to do?" she moaned. "What can I possibly do? I must get him home somehow."

"How in the world——" said he, mechanically pulling off the thick gloves he wore.

"Oh, it was my fault! I had persuaded him to let me drive. I can drive Rufus—I didn't see it was Black Prince, and then—then I had to go on, for my silly pride's sake; and the lightning made him shy—just there, at the corner. I don't think the cart's hurt, but father was pitched out—the wheel scraped the wall——"

"But he was *thrown out?*" repeated Warristoun, as if this was incredible. He took the lamp from her hand, and stooped closer. Then he rose hastily, and sent one of his searching looks at her. She hung her head. What was the use of bluff?

"He—he was—trying to get possession of the reins, I think . . . and the lightning dazzled one so . . ."



It sounded too foolish and her voice died away.

"Think you could contrive to tie up his head?" asked the man in an odd, shamefaced voice, fumbling in his pocket and producing a clean handkerchief. The torrent of rain had ceased as suddenly as it began. The thunder was passing. One could breathe again and think. She took the offered cambric with gratitude, made a pad of her own, and contrived the kind of turban which nurses twist—not to her own satisfaction but dexterously enough to excite his remark.

"Ah, they told me you were a nurse," he murmured, watching in an absorbed way.

She rose from her knees, found some wet dock-leaves by the roadside, and wiped her fingers free from blood and dirt.

"He's a pretty good lump of a man," remarked Warristoun, "but I think I can manage his shoulders if you can lift his legs." He went to the back of the cart and opened the door. "We must shove him in here, on the floor, and push up his legs so as to be able to shut the door," said he. "He will be pretty safe like that till we can get him home. I say—wouldn't it be best to drive to the Place, and let the nurses and doctors see to him?"

"Oh no! No! On no account!" she burst out in an agony. "I can see to him! I have plenty of experience—if once I can get him home it will be all right! Don't think me rude, but I must drive him back at once. If you can help me push him into the cart, as you suggest, I can drive on without troubling you further."

He made no more words, but bent with her to the task—no easy one—of lifting Pennant from the ground. To hoist him to the height of the cart was impossible; but it was accomplished by dint of propping the limp body on the iron step, where Jacynth



managed to support it while Warristoun climbed into the cart and drew it up from above.

It was an undignified proceeding, and the huddled form, drawn up, knees to chin, was not a pleasant sight. However, it was the best they could do. They rolled a spare coat to support his head, and spread the waterproof rug over him. Then Warristoun took his motor cycle, led it to a gate opening upon a woodland footpath by the river, put it inside, extinguishing the lamp, came back, and without a word climbed into the driving seat.

"Don't do that!" cried Jacynth with vexation. "I can drive home now. Black Prince is tired, he will give no more trouble—and you have done more than enough——"

"Here, stop it. Don't waste time," he replied roughly. "I'm going to see you home"; and she acquiesced without further protest.

Never, never had she felt so humbled as when she took her seat beside him; and to her own rage, the tears of mortification would roll down her cheeks. She could not even wipe them away, having used all available handkerchiefs for bandaging. Her only consolation was that it was too dark for her companion to see her miserable face.

## CHAPTER XVI

### JACYNTH FAILS

HE could not for long smother his curiosity. "I say, how did you come to be out so late? You didn't go to the Fair, surely?"

"No—oh no. I was—er—cycling, alone. The—the rain came on. I found myself at Bircastle, and so I went to the Duke's Head to leave my bicycle and drive home with my father."

The darkness, which hid her tears, was useless to conceal the trouble in her voice. When Warristoun spoke, his words were meant to be consoling. "I say—I wouldn't advise you to be too anxious. To tell you the truth, I expect Pennant was a bit stupid—been having a drop down there in Bircastle, hadn't he?"

That let loose the flood. "Oh, can't you *see*? Can't you understand that it's that—just that—which makes the trouble? I didn't want you to find out! I was a little fool, I thought I could get him home quietly——"

He broke in with incredulous impatience. "But bless me, child, it's no crime for a fellow to get a bit happy!"

"I daresay you may not think so," she snapped inconsistently. "You have been brutalised by living among coarse men—men who think nothing of it. But my father! My own father! . . . To me it's simply unbearable." Her voice trailed off into sobs.

They were now out upon the open road, unshadowed by trees. There was a rising moon behind the clouds, so that it was not altogether dark. Her words seemed



to strike him forcibly, for he bent his head and his eyes searched her face. "You hate it as much as all that," he said, as one musing aloud upon a discovery: "You talk about Tommies getting drunk, but they don't, you know. It's the officers that do that. . . . And so you wouldn't excuse it? Wouldn't marry a man who drank?"

"Marry a man who drank? Not if he were a king! A millionaire! The last man on earth! Oh, to me it's bestial, degrading . . . and my dad was not like that! He has only done it lately! Done it to obtain forgetfulness—because there is something on his mind—something he dare not think of! It's your fault, he knows you can beggar us all with a word! Now he is growing old, and you have come back, he thinks he will be turned out! Oh, why did you come back! Why did you?"

She flung it all out with that madness of relief in expression which sometimes attacks the reticent. And when she heard his laugh, full of bitterness, and of pain as well, she began to realise her folly and her extreme unkindness.

"Don't you think you're perhaps a bit—unwise?" he asked cuttingly.

She made an effort to master the sobs which were shaking her. "Oh, I daresay. I suppose so. I don't feel as if I care! I was so happy—that day you came upon me, in the churchyard—and you have changed everything."

"You're a little fool," he retorted hotly. "You don't know what you're talking about. It was a jolly good thing for you that I did come back, and I was only just in time! You may rage at me and bully me, but I'm going to do my duty, however much you may wish me dead!"

"What do you mean?"

"Never you mind. I'm not going to talk about it now. Here we are at the cross-roads, and I don't think we had better drive up the main street, do you? If I turn to the left, can't we enter Free Croft by the stable yard, and receive somewhat less of the kind attention of our neighbours?"

She saw the excellent sense of this. "That is a good thought. You are considerate," said she, dimly conscious that it was not the first time she had thought so. And after a minute she added: "I'm sorry—desperately sorry to have spoken so rudely. I'm afraid you'll think me most ungrateful, and indeed I'm not. I can't imagine what I should have done if someone had not come by. What a mercy that you happened to be out—such a night, too!"

"Yes—funny thing, that, wasn't it?" he replied absently. "I say—pull me up when I come to the right gate. I don't know this alley very well."

She forced herself to composure, directed him where to stop, climbed down and opened the gate, holding it while he drove carefully in and brought up before the kitchen door.

Descending from his seat, he secured the horse and came to her, as she stood behind the cart, peering under the rug with a depressed air.

"Is anybody up, do you think?" he asked, in an undertone.

"I am just wondering. What time is it?"

"Nearly midnight."

"Oh, then the maids are in bed and asleep."

"That's good. I'll get him upstairs for you, and then I'll go for the doctor."

"No!" the word shot out as the horrible thought of Dr. Grice fell like a new stroke upon a flagellated back.

"We—we must do without a doctor."

He answered quietly: "I know you're a nurse, and so you are a better judge than I. But he's a heavy man, and he fell from a high cart. If there are no bones broken I should call it surprising. Now I've a suggestion to make. Let me go and fetch Haynes to you—he's our M.O. up at the Place. Quite a good sort, and I could trust him to keep a quiet tongue. I'll bring him in by this back way, and if he finds things a bit more serious than we hope, he can render first aid, and—er—and then Grice needn't be called in until the effects of the other thing have worn off."

Jacynth stood considering. "Thank you," she said, "that is a kind plan. But how should we explain to Dr. Grice?"

"Very easily. Say that the doctor and I happened upon your carriage accident. As it happens, Haynes and I were actually out together this evening. We hadn't parted five minutes when I met you."

"I see—it would be the obvious thing, in that case, for him to do what had to be done—would it not?"

"Of course. He can call on Grice to-morrow and explain—give his own version, you know. Grice is visiting physician at the Place, so they are good friends. It will be all right. Now—I suppose your sisters know of this—this little failing?"

"Oh yes."

"Then run along in and tell them what has happened. It will take us all to get him upstairs. Then I'll go for Haynes at once."

The door had been left open for the entrance of the master. In fact, it was often left open all night. Jacynth slipped in quietly, and proceeding to the morning room, found both girls still up, nodding over the fire, not knowing what had happened, and wondering *if they dared go to bed.*

She winced from their excitement, their incredulity, their mixture of consternation and gratification.

"*Warristoun?*" For a while it seemed that all they could do was to reiterate his name. However, when they understood what was required of them, they rose to the occasion staunchly. Margie went off to boil a kettle for hot fomentations, and Doss came to give her aid in conveying the patient upstairs.

The moment this was accomplished the squire disappeared.

When he returned later, with Dr. Haynes in attendance, they found Jacynth on duty in the sick-room, in her Red Cross uniform, as neat and composed as though the nightmare drive in the rain were a thing of unreality.

She had already ascertained that her father had broken a collarbone; and the doctor's examination brought no further mischief to light.

Jacynth assured them that she would require no help in the nursing. Her sisters would relieve her, and she felt quite able to undertake the case. She would apply at once for extension of leave, and thought she would most likely obtain it without much difficulty, as the Mauby hospital was not at the moment very full.

Dr. Haynes was impressed both by her capacity and her charm. He promised to put all right with Dr. Grice; and, as he would not be able to see him until after midday, there ought to be but little trace of the alcoholic condition by the time he paid his professional visit.

"Please impress upon my sisters the fact that they are to say nothing to Mrs. Grice meanwhile. They will take more heed of an order from you than from me," said Jacynth. "And when you mention the accident, put it all down to my bad driving. If you



say that the horse became unmanageable and that my father was thrown out in attempting to take the reins from me, just as I fouled the corner of the bridge, you will be telling the truth. The only thing not true will be your statement that you were present at the time."

"As a matter of fact," said the young doctor eagerly, "I was out with Warristoun last night, and several people know it. We——"

"Here, Haynes, don't stop talking there. Let Miss Pennant rest. She is ready to drop," said Warristoun roughly; and grasping his friend's arm he led him away without allowing him to say more.

In fact, it was time they were off, for dawn was breaking. Doss saw them to the door, pouring out effusive thanks to both. She and Margie, being wholly free from the anxieties weighing upon their sister, were rather enjoying the adventure, and hospitably insisted upon pressing refreshment upon the two helpers.

"Poor Warristoun!" said Doss with a sentimental sigh, as the door was finally closed upon them. "I wonder if he remembers the last time he went to Brough Hill Fair?"

"Why, yes. That was the beginning of everything, wasn't it?" replied Margie. "Miss Bellairs had arrived for the shooting, and Guy had seen her and was just beginning to make trouble; and poor Alys Lang and all! . . . I wonder if he thought about it?"

"You may bet that Captain Monkland did," replied her sister. "Didn't you think he looked *awful* this morning, as they whizzed past? Or yesterday morning, I suppose I ought to say. I expect you noticed that he didn't come back in the car? Wonder where he was. Sir John was as cross as two sticks, wasn't he? Just because those poor boys stopped to pass the time of day with us."



"I wonder how Hector got home? He certainly wasn't on the drag," said Doss with lively curiosity. They went off to bed discussing it.

When at last the house was silent, Jacynth lay down upon a sofa in the room of her still unconscious patient, but could not sleep.

She was trying to foresee what might result from this night's mishap.

In spite of the kindly precautions taken by the squire, it was not likely that Pennant's broken collar-bone would be set down in the neighbourhood to any other reason than the true one.

All up and down the Dale it would be said that he had exceeded on the night of the Fair. Hector would know. What would he do? There was time for him to draw back. He had not put the decisive question.

This thought brought the swift recollection of her appointment with him. She was to meet him on the moors at eleven o'clock. This was doubly impossible, since not only must she stay with her patient, but she had no bicycle, having left hers in Bircastle.

It was therefore necessary to let Hector know that she was unable to keep the appointment; and the only way to do so was to write at once, and give the letter to the postwoman as she came up the Dale in the morning.

She saw that in all probability, if they met that day, Captain Monkland would not have heard the rumour. He might become engaged to her and then wish he had been less precipitate. This was an intolerable thought. The postponement would give him his chance. If he desired, as she felt he very reasonably might, to back out, he had but to remain passive. She would so word her note that the next step must come from him.

Having made up her mind, she rose softly, procured



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writing materials, and with many pauses wrote her brief message.

"DEAR CAPTAIN MONKLAND,

"Only a very real reason would prevent me from keeping my appointment to meet you this afternoon. Such a reason unfortunately exists. My father has had an accident; due, I fear, to my inexpert driving. He has fractured his collarbone, and I am nursing him. You will therefore not expect to see me at How Cross.

"Yours sincerely,

"JACYNTH PENNANT."

Her note written, she could not lie down again, lest sleep should overcome her, and she not awaken in time to meet the postwoman, who usually arrived in the village about seven o'clock.

Her thoughts were bad company; she could not read, and it was a very wan and haggard young person, with dark marks below her eyes, who descended to the yard and handed in her note to be added to the bulky consignment for the Grange which filled the messenger's wallet.

## CHAPTER XVII

### FORSAKEN

**I**T was late next morning when Pennant awoke. His stupor had passed into natural sleep, and Jacynth herself had had a couple of hours' rest. Upon arising, she noticed that his slumbers were growing lighter, his movements more frequent. She did not move or speak when his eyes opened at last, but silently followed his gaze as it travelled round the room, noted familiar objects, and questioned unfamiliar ones, such as a small table covered with lint, gauze and other surgical requirements. The roving glance came to rest at last upon herself, and as their eyes met she knew him to be fully conscious, completely self-collected. She waited for him to speak, and evidently he found it difficult. After a swift survey, he averted his gaze, and the dark colour of shame flowed over his face as he closed his eyes. She came to the bedside and took his hand.

Grasping hers he muttered nervously, with his eyes shut: "How did you—get me home?"

Evidently he remembered what had happened. She briefly gave him the outlines of what had followed upon his fall. He listened with a stony helplessness; made but few inquiries; and offered no comment. Jacynth abased herself in her remorse. She declared that her own folly was to blame for all. She ought to have insisted upon his remaining at the Duke's Head. She would not wound him by explaining exactly why she had felt it so impossible to leave him there.



In silence he heard all her pitiful apology; and, after a long interval, in which he presumably turned over the matter in his mind, he remarked heavily that he did not suppose it signified.

This was anything but comforting to poor Jass's self-esteem, which was hard hit. Even Doss and Margie, she found, were inclined to think that she had been remarkably stupid. "Well, you *have* been and gone and done it now," had been their immediate verdict.

Influenced by Mrs. Grice, they had of late been inclined to suppose that they had undervalued their young sister. But she had now perpetrated a piece of folly of which neither of them would have been guilty. As the result of her well-meant interference, their father had been picked out of the gutter, 'dead drunk, by the very man from whom they most wished to conceal his weakness. They did not "rub it in"—they were too essentially good-natured for that—but to each other they remarked that Jass's blunder would most likely result in the collapse of her hopes with regard to Captain Monkland.

"Her ladyship will hear of it—sure to," they argued. "Warristoun won't go talking of it up and down the Dale, but he's sure to mention it at the Grange."

Dr. Grice paid his dreaded visit at about four o'clock in the afternoon. Pennant, having had Warristoun's considerate policy fully explained to him, nerved himself to carry off the awkward situation.

He said that his young daughter, cycling by herself, had been caught in the storm and had to come to him in Bircastle, where they had left her machine, and started to drive home.

"You know what these lasses are," said he indulgently; "think they can do everything we can! Oh, she drives well, I'm not denying it. The horse was at the end of a long day too, ye see, and I thought he

was safe on the road to his stable. She would have done all right if a clap of thunder and the bridge corner hadn't happened to coincide. But there it was! And I can't blame her too much, seeing I knew the spirit of the animal."

Grice listened with breathless interest. He always made Jacynth think of a terrier with its ears pricked. It was not easy to guess what he thought; but she gathered 'that Pennant's story, following upon what he had already heard from Haynes, somewhat impressed him. She could not detect, either in his questions to the patient or to herself, that he was sceptical of the version offered him.

He concluded his examination by saying that 'all was going as well as could be, and that Mr. Pennant, if content to lie quiet for a time, would make a perfect recovery. He understood that there was practically no damage either to horse or trap; so that, on the whole, things might have been much worse. Jacynth, as she rolled fresh bandages, wondered if it could have been worse.

Nevertheless, she felt real gratitude, both to Waristoun and Haynes, who had most certainly given no hint that anything in her father's condition could have contributed to the accident. She knew that his fine constitution bore as yet small trace of alcoholism; and since her home-coming he had been on the whole rigidly sober, but for this outbreak.

Doss and Margie were sharp enough, and she had warned them both to be on their guard against any kind of pumping on the part of the doctor. After his departure they told her that he had asked no questions and seemingly accepted the whole affair to be exactly as it was given out.

The relief which this gave to Jacynth helped her *through* two or three weary days and nights. But at



the end of that time cold creeping doubts could no longer be kept at bay. There came no reply at all to her letter to Captain Monkland. Most people sent inquiries, or notes of sympathy; but neither note nor message arrived from the Grange. She began to forebode the worst. She was to be called upon, it seemed, to pay the full price of her blunder.

The squire enquired personally each day, to the delight of Doss and Margie. He did not ask to come upstairs, neither did the nurse descend. As day after day passed in the same awful silence, Jacynth knew there could be but one cause. By this time, the landlord of the Duke's Head had no doubt talked. Everyone knew why the intercourse between Mannadale and Free Croft had ceased as suddenly as it began.

She began to feel that it would be impossible for her to face the inhabitants of the Dale again. She determined to be off to France the moment her father could do without her, that she might not have to face the amused pity of the Grices, of Miss Bellairs, of Pearson and all the other sharp-eyed onlookers who had seen Hector's distinction of herself.

After the first day Pennant remained dumb concerning the whole position. He grew more and more silent. In fact, he hardly ever spoke but in answer to what she said. She believed that he often feigned sleep, when really he was occupied in morosé, tragic thought. He watched her covertly, but never questioned her.

One afternoon, when, as far as his injury went, he was well on the way to recovery, Nora came upstairs and knocked. The two elder girls were out at a tennis party, and Jacynth, who had heard the bell, supposed that the visitor would have been sent away.

"It's Lady Monkland, miss," said Nora, somewhat flurried, "and she asked particularly for you."

For a moment, to her own rage, Jacynth felt positively faint. She was aware of her father's eyes fixed upon her in almost unbearable tension; and with a huge effort she controlled herself to say to him quietly:

"Lady Monkland has come herself to ask after you. How kind!"

She was ashamed of her own access of nervousness as she went downstairs. But when she entered the room she saw what steeled her and restored her self-command. Not only Lady Monkland, but Adela Belairs awaited her.

To maintain her own dignity was now the paramount idea of her mind.

"Why, Sister!" cried Adela, breaking in upon her aunt's greetings with dainty malice, "how natural it looks to see you in uniform! But I hardly dare shake hands!—I used to be far beneath Miss Pennant, you know," she went on, turning to her ladyship, "at Mauby! I had to skip at her orders, didn't I, Sister?"

"Then I'm sorry for you, Miss Pennant. I am sure Adela was a vile probationer," replied Aunt Bessie, smiling sympathetically at Jacynth. "But let me speak, please, Adela. Miss Pennant, I come full of apologies. Mr. Warristoun did tell us, some days ago, of your father's unfortunate accident; but I could not make my inquiries sooner, as my nephew, Captain Monkland, has been ill."

"Captain Monkland ill? I am sorry," replied Jacynth's lips; but Jacynth's heart began to lift a little. If Hector had been ill, then his own silence and his aunt's apparent neglect were both satisfactorily explained. "Was it the wound which is giving trouble?"

"Well, not altogether. He took a chill——" Lady Monkland was palpably nervous, and Adela took the words out of her mouth with suspicious eagerness.



"Yes. You may remember how shocked I was, on arriving here, to find my cousin looking so much less well than when we parted in France. I told my aunt that I felt certain this Dale air was far too keen for him, but everybody laughed at me until the day of the Fair, when he was caught in that frightful storm and took this chill. . . . And so now they are satisfied that I was right, and we have just been down to the station to see him off. He has gone to Cornwall."

"He begged me to call in and make his adieux to you," put in Lady Monkland, speaking with great gentleness. "He did not at all like going away without taking leave of your family. But Dr. Haynes, who had been attending him, would not allow him to stop on his way to the station, even for that."

"I am indeed sorry he has been so ill," said Jacynth, quite quietly. Adela sat staring at her like a dog who expects a bone and gets nothing. This trim composure made her furious. Jacynth, to herself, hardly seemed to be making any effort for control. To display feeling would have been more difficult. She felt numb.

"I have been so taken up, nursing my father, that I have been completely tied," she said to Lady Monkland. "So I have heard nothing of your anxiety. I can understand—he must be of such importance to you."

"Exactly"—a little sigh of relief at the unexpectedly easy going. "You nursed him so devotedly at Mauby. Do tell me—did you consider him delicate? In other ways, I mean? Or was it only his wound?"

"You must remember I had not known him before. I put it all down to his wound," was the tranquil reply. "I suppose he is not really very strong. But I think there is no reason why he should not make a complete recovery."

Her ladyship, interested and relieved, could not re-



sist the putting of further questions and received steady and sincere replies. She rose and took leave at last with a feeling of gratitude towards this girl, so strong that it might almost be described as affection. Her demeanour throughout the interview had been so right—so exactly what would be dictated by a character of grit and self-respect. As Aunt Bessie recalled Hector's miserable face in the train, she wondered for the hundredth time what was behind it all. Could it be possible that the little Pennant girl had refused him? If she had, he could hardly have looked more utterly cast down.

"Hector will have a glorious time at Penhythe," Adela was saying to Jacynth. "I know some delightful girls down there—the Harmans. One of them is a dream of beauty—serpentine—the sort Hector never can resist! I have written to ask them to love him very dearly, and I expect he will have the time of his life."

As these words fell upon Lady Monkland's ears, she could not doubt that they were uttered with the deliberate intention to wound. Her niece had spoken to her very plainly of the degradation to the family if Hector should marry a Pennant. She began to wonder whether Adela's hand was at the bottom of the young man's sudden yielding—of his promising to go away after vowing in plainest terms that nothing should make him budge. The whole affair was puzzling her.

Jacynth hardly knew how she took leave of the departing ladies. She dared not go upstairs for a while, until she had fought for her usual calm. She sat in the drawing-room, in a dazed condition, trying to realise that the blow had definitely fallen. Lady Monkland had been very kind. She had broken the news in the most gracious way, by coming to pay a



visit. But to Jacynth the whole thing was as clear as daylight. If Lady Monkland had said in so many words: "We have removed Captain Monkland from your influence, as we think a marriage between you undesirable," she could not, in the girl's opinion, have made her meaning more plain.

That was over. Uncertain of her own feeling though she had been, she must needs resent this ending to her romance. One likes to arrange these affairs oneself.

The striking clock warned her that she must go and prepare her father's tea. She went back into the sick-room as briskly as she could, trying to ignore the wistful eyes which followed her about.

"Any news, Jass?" he asked at last, as she said nothing about her visitors.

"Well, yes. Lady Monkland apologised for not coming sooner. She explained that the captain had been ill. He took a chill at Brough Hill Fair. She was on her way from seeing him off at the station. He has gone to Cornwall."

Try as she would, she knew that her voice was not perfectly natural. There followed a long, difficult silence. Pennant said nothing at all; and when he had finished tea she removed the things without speech, and sat down to some sewing instead of offering, as usual, to read aloud to him.

After a while, glancing up from her work, she saw him staring blackly at the opposite wall, while slow tears made their way down his cheeks, apparently unnoticed.

Still she said nothing. What was there to say? He must know himself to be the destroyer of his darling's prospects; and she could partly enter into the violence of his self-reproach. But neither he nor she *could speak of it.*

About half-past six Nora knocked again, and brought in a little screw of a note for Jacynth. It was a hastily-pencilled scrawl from Doris.

"Do forgive us," she wrote, "we are not coming home to supper. Matron, from the Place, was at the party this afternoon, and she has persuaded us to go back and spend the evening with her. She says she has been meaning to invite us for some time, as we have both done such fine work for her. We know you won't mind, it is such a chance for us. Fancy! Matron! who never invites anybody! We are getting on, my dear, in spite of your little blunder the other night.

"Doss."

This gave her something of which she could speak to her father, and she told him that the girls had sent word that they would not be home to dinner. She did not tell him that they were going to the Place, because she knew that any mention, direct or indirect, of Warristoun depressed him and caused his mind to run on unwelcome topics. She busied herself in bringing up his dinner, eating her own in the same room, in hopes of rallying his spirits; but she had received too severe a shock to be anything like her normal, serene self.

Her struggle for cheerfulness was made harder by her own increasing perception of the man's misery. She knew that he was, almost certainly, believing the blow to be heavier than it really was. She even debated the possibility of assuring him that, sorely wounded though her pride must be, her heart was not broken. At last she ventured upon a few halting words to that effect; but from the way in which they were received she knew that he did not believe them,



and that his supposing her to be endeavouring to comfort him was only increasing his passionate remorse, and his agony of love for her unselfish courage.

Realising that it was dangerous to let him brood, she insisted upon cribbage when the meal had been removed. He was most unwilling to play, but after ten minutes she believed that his attention was in part diverted by it. They had, however, not been long at their game when Nora appeared with a message that Mr. Warristoun was downstairs.

"Oh, Nora! You should have said the young ladies were out!"

"So I did, miss, but he said he would like to see you for a few minutes."

"Say I'll come," was her reply; and she lifted the bed table and cribbage board.

"Warristoun? What's he want?" asked Pennant huskily.

"Oh, just to inquire. He has been most days since your accident."

"Ay, he's been considerate, eh, Jass? You'll be civil? Not put his back up?"

"I shan't find it hard to be civil to him now, dear. He has acted like a friend. I don't know what I should have done if he hadn't happened along that road. I've been wanting to thank him. Don't you worry about our quarrelling."

He turned upon her a curious look, almost as if he were relieved to be rid of her. "Don't hurry back. I don't mind being left," said he. "If he wants to see me, he can come up. But not at once—not at once."

He had turned extraordinarily pale, as though the thought of Warristoun were more than he could bear. She decided not to let the visitor come upstairs that evening. She put her father's pipe and book and news-

paper within reach, tidied the room with one or two swift touches; and then, having been on duty all day, went to find clean sleeves and handkerchief before going downstairs. As she returned from her own room, passing along the passage, she heard a sound from the sickroom—the sound of a drawer being shut, in rickety fashion, by a person using only one arm.

"Now, what does he want that I have not given him?" Opening the door, she went in to see.

He had evidently been out of bed, and hopped back quickly when he heard her hand on the latch; for he coloured and stared blankly, guiltily thrusting under the bedclothes something which he held in his hand.

"What did you want, dear?" she asked with sinking heart, feeling certain that he had a secret supply of spirits in the room. She went up to the bed and pulled back the sheet, in full expectation of finding a bottle there. What she saw was so much worse and so unexpected that she turned physically cold. The blood, rushing to her heart, left her white as paper. It was a revolver with which he had provided himself.

"Father!" It was the only word which came to her. With shaking hands she took up the thing, and laid it down upon a table. Pennant rolled over, burying his face in the pillow. He did not speak.

In France the nurses had been taught to handle revolvers—to load and unload them. Jass took up this one, and found it loaded in every chamber. After a stifling pause:

"I will ring and ask Nora to tell Mr. Warristoun that I dare not leave you, even for a moment. You are not to be trusted . . ." she broke off momentarily, but after swallowing her emotion, brought out:

"Is there nothing you can spare me? Must I touch the very lowest depths? *The daughter of a suicide.*"

He gave a low roar, as of an animal suddenly hit.

"Jass—my lass! My little darling—I swear I won't!—I didn't reflect!—I—Jass, for God's sake go down to him—leave me! I'm to be trusted now. As I hope to see your mother again, I give you my word I'll not attempt anything. . . ."

Struggling up among his pillows, he held out his free arm to her and all his being was in his voice. "Jass, little love, I promise you! I, who have broken every promise I made to you! I've rolled you in the dust, I've spoilt your life . . . but I swear I never thought of what this would mean to you! I only wanted to chuck the game, to end the torment! I didn't think how I was letting you down! But I see it now. Trust me this once more, Jass . . . just once more!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A WAY OUT

**W**ARRISTOUN was roaming up and down the drawing-room, his hands behind his back, his mouth puckered into the soundless whistle which always accompanied his moments of cogitation.

When Jacynth entered he stood still, directing upon her the search-look which she resented. Her hands shook as she turned aside a moment to slip something she carried behind a silver photo-frame.

"Took you all that time to make up your mind to face me?" he asked resentfully. Then, as she came nearer and he saw her in the light, "I say—you're not looking well! Anything wrong?"

She gave him her hand, with eyes lowered so as not to face his. "I'm sorry I kept you waiting. I had to do something for my father. I assure you I did not mean to be discourteous. I am glad to see you—to have a chance of saying 'Thank you' for all you did for me. . . . Do sit down, won't you?"

"*You'd* better sit down. You don't look fit to stand. Have you seen a ghost, or is Pennant worse?"

She sat down upon the end of the sofa, that happening to be nearest. "I hardly know what to answer," she said sadly. "He gets on as well as can be, as far as bodily condition goes. It is his mind. . . ."

"His mind?"

"His mental agony. I don't know what it is. I mean, I don't know *why* it is. But he is down in the



depths of something like despair—and—I can't think of another word. It is agony."

"Yes," replied the man musingly, "I'm afraid it is. Well, don't you think it's time we did something to stop it? To stop the agony, I mean? To put an end to his suspense?"

He had been standing over her, and at that she raised her head and looked at him to see what he meant. "I suppose," she said, a little impatiently, "that you are the only person who could do that. If he has done wrong it must be you to whom he is accountable. Oh, tell me! I had rather know the worst!—I shall have to know it, in the end"—she broke off on a small sound like a sob.

He sat down beside her on the sofa. "I think you're right," said he, "I shall have to tell you the main facts. No need to go into detail. I'm sorry to shock you, but there it is! Pennant has robbed me, right and left. He has had the revenues of the estate in his hands for four years. He has handled the place splendidly, he has made an increasing profit each year; and it's all gone. I haven't yet found out what he has done with it; but it is gone. I ought to confess that I finally made up my mind to reappear because I got a hint of it. But I wasn't going to act until I was really sure. He has been very clever, and I'm afraid I allowed him to believe that I might be hoodwinked. But I have the whole thing in my hands at last; and I think he knows it."

"Yes," replied the miserable girl, after silence. "He knows it. Ever since you came home he has been waiting for the blow to fall. Of course I suspected—something. Perhaps not so bad as it really is. You are sure—he has no defence?" she suddenly broke out wistfully.

"Do you think he has any defence?" asked War-



ristoun pityingly. "If so, he shall have every chance."

The tears rose to her eyes as she shook her head. "I know he is guilty," she faltered. "His whole bearing shows it. . . . And now, the only question is, how long can you give him? . . . How far can you spare him? . . . I mean, how far will it be necessary for his disgrace to be public?"

"That," said the squire, staring straight before him, "depends on you."

She had no glimmering of his meaning. "Depends on me?"

"'M," he nodded gravely. "On you. I know the customary procedure in these cases quite well. I've been reading a lot of novels during the duration. Nothing else to do, most of the time. It was always the recognised method, when the villain wanted to put pressure on the girl. He invariably said, 'Refuse me, and I ruin your father.' The difficulty nowadays is to find a girl who cares two straws about her father. But I believe you really do. . . . Naturally, if Pen-nant was my father-in-law, I should be anxious to hush up all this unpleasantness, and—and give him another chance."

"Am I delirious," asked Jass, putting her hands to her head, "or is this your idea of a joke, Mr. War-ristoun?"

"Neither," he replied instantly. "I'm just asking you to marry me, that's all. Will you?"

She rose and went towards the door. "Either you mean to be insulting, or you are much in the state of my unfortunate father on the night of the Fair. In either case, I will not detain you."

He also rose, went up to her, took her by the hand and led her back to her seat. "Don't be a little fool," said he temperately. "You ought to see quite well *that I'm as sober as a judge*. I've never been drunk



in the whole of my life—not once—and I'm not likely to begin now. I called here this evening to ask you to marry me. You really must give the question your kind consideration."

"You ask me to marry you—in order to prevent my father's dismissal?"

"Well, yes, that's one reason. There are several others. . . . The trouble is that I don't quite see my way to giving you any of them at this moment. However, that *is* a reason all right, isn't it? It may not be the best one can think of, but it's weighty—I mean it weighs with you, doesn't it?"

"I think I must ask you to suggest others."

"Well, h'm! Here's one, at all events. I want to get married, and I think I should like to marry you. That's something, isn't it?"

She stared at him, more and more bewildered. "Why should you think—why should you imagine for a moment that you want to marry me? Because I suppose the idea is quite momentary."

"Oh no, you don't really think that. I have thought so ever since we met—beside Guy's grave."

Jacynth tried to summon her common sense, to find words in which to rebuke him for levity. Something in him which she could not understand stood in the way. He sat regarding her seriously, deeply interested, but apparently not vitally concerned in the matter at issue.

"You can hardly need to be told that I don't," she began awkwardly.

"That you don't think you want to marry me?" he cut in quickly. "Of course I know that. I'm not the kind of man a girl falls in love with."

"But Miss Bellairs——" The words slipped out before she could stop them. "I beg your pardon," cried *she in confusion*.

"Miss Bellairs," said Warristoun grimly, "would like to marry Estongarth Place. I wouldn't marry her if she were the only woman on earth. So that's that."

"Well, but if you see, as you say you do, that I don't think of you as one should think of the man you are to spend your life with——"

"Miss Pennant," he broke in unexpectedly, "do you think I'm the kind of man one could trust?"

Had anyone asked her that question an hour before, she would have replied offhand, "No." Now she raised her gaze from the strong hand which lay upon his knee, and looked him in the face. The eyes were flinty, but they were perfectly straightforward and unflinching. There dawned upon her a conviction that he was, conspicuously, trustworthy. She did not try to put this into words, but he must have read some kind of affirmative in her look, for he went on:

"Well, I want you to trust me, once for all—to do a thing that must sound to you pretty headlong, but which will turn out to be the wisest step you ever took. I want you to marry me—now—almost at once; and to trust me for the rest. And I make you this promise. When we are married I'll hand out to you all those other reasons, which I'm keeping back."

"But why can't you tell me them now?"

"Because," said he, with a curiously naïve grin, "I'm not at all sure that they would serve my cause. There are—let me see—one, two, three, four of them—all very strong. But you must wait to hear them. I wish you would take my word for it, that, if you'll marry me, you'll be all right. I repeat it—*all right*."

There was urgency in his voice, and she began to tremble. "But that must be nonsense. How could it be all right, to be married to a man for whom I have no regard, and to have entered upon the marriage for *my own selfish reasons*?"



"Would they be selfish?"

"Oh, I don't know! I can't tell how far they would be selfish," she cried. "It is misery to see him suffer, but of course my self-love, my pride, comes in too——"

"I know you pretty well by this time, and I know you're not selfish—that is, not more than enough to make you human! Put it this way. Say that in marrying me you sacrifice yourself to secure to your father a happy old age. Say you give up your chance of romance, in order that he may be spared poverty and disgrace. Would that be such a very hard bargain?"

"But this is such an extraordinary way for you to talk!" she burst out.

"I daresay. But you wouldn't turn me down because I'm not just like the conventional suitor, would you? Come, now, let us leave the point for a minute and speak of something else. When I came in this evening, you were frightfully shaken. Something had happened to upset you badly—hadn't it? Well, I saw that at once; and your own sisters wouldn't have seen it, would they? And if they had, you couldn't have spoken to them about it—you don't give them your confidence. But I believe that you *could* give it to me. I believe that you will—that's more. Tell me the trouble. I might be able to help."

Jass felt as if she were being hypnotised. There was some compelling force about this man. He was sitting beside her, like a friend—hardly a lover, but of his sympathy she could have no doubt; and his comprehension was uncanny. Her dire need of someone to whom she could speak of the hideous discovery she had made the moment before coming downstairs, drove her. She turned to him, and out it came, in broken, disjointed words—her mazed brain seemed incapable of clear narration.

*He listened with earnest attention. In his de-*

meanour was no least sign of its having been some thing very different which he, knowing of Lady Monkland's visit, had expected to be told.

As the girl relieved her overcharged heart, he realised with delight how strongly the incident she revealed reinforced his own case.

"Well," said he, "after this I really wonder that you can hesitate. You have it in your power to walk up those stairs, enter that room, and say to him: 'Dad, Ranulf and I are going to get married, and bygones are to be bygones.'—That will cure him at once and for ever. Now—can't you pluck up the courage to do it?"

She turned pale. "Is it fair to put such pressure upon me—such cruel pressure?"

"Perhaps it isn't," he said with a sigh and a shrug. "They say all's fair in—um! Ah! the point is, that I'm pressed myself. It is so important to me to get your promise now, that, if I can obtain it by bullying—well, I'm sorry, but I fear I must bully a little."

"It's such an odd mixture of bullying and kindness."

"I won't bully when we're married, I give you my oath to that. Once you are my wife you shall dictate. You shall be boss. I don't mind telling you you'll never regret it."

"Oh, but this is wild—mad."

"Jove, though, but it would be sport, wouldn't it?" He chuckled like a schoolboy. "Think of the sensation that the announcement would make, all up and down the Dale! I should enjoy seeing their faces, up at the Grange! I believe in your heart you would, too."

At the words there rose to Jass's mental vision a picture of the voice and eyes of Adela Bellairs that afternoon, as she had sat there, in this very place, *hoping to see Jacynth writhe as she hurled at her the*

news which she believed would break her heart. . . .

As she felt afterwards, all that was small and mean in her rose to the surface. She saw that face, confronted with the news of Ranulf's engagement to herself. His chance shot had hit a mark: she clenched her hands with a small excited laugh.

"Suppose I say 'Yes,' just for the sake of the sensation," said she daringly. "I could break it off afterwards."

"No, you don't," he answered like a flash. "I shan't give you time. The moment you say 'Yes' we're going to get married. I've been jilted once, and I'll be shot if I'm going through that again. I warn you that your answer will be final."

She gasped. "Final." . . . At least then there would be an end of doubt. Deep down in her lay the wild, furious resentment of the woman scorned, who longs to flout him who scorned her, by whatever means.

Stealing another glance at Warristoun, she recoiled in fear from the lamp of hope suddenly lit in his face.

It confused her, and she did not know what to say. Her throat seemed closing, her heart pounded. She tried to enumerate the objections—the more important objections—to his insane scheme. She could not recall them—could not formulate them. "No! No! No!" she reiterated vaguely, hardly realising that she said it.

"I won't take 'No,'" replied Warristoun, and his voice had dropped to a curious quiet. "You know I won't. It's not a bit of use, Jass. You must say 'Yes.'" He felt in his pocket and drew out something which he held concealed in the palm of his hand. She did not know what it was, nor what he intended to do next, but she grasped his wrist with both hands.

"If I say 'No,' you tell me you will expose father?"

"I don't say that. But I must dismiss him from my

employ. You couldn't expect me to keep him, could you, after what he has done?"

"You know he wouldn't do it ever again."

"If I held you as a hostage for his good behaviour, I could be sure of him; not else."

If only she could bring to her lips those strong reasons for refusal which she knew existed! Words would not come; she gazed at him with eyes blank with perplexity.

"Listen," said Warristoun gently, putting his right hand over the two of hers which clutched him, "I'm behaving so badly already that I may as well be thoroughly odious, and point out to you one aspect of the case which perhaps escapes you. It's just this. Do you think the society round about here will consider that I, or you, have the best of this bargain? Even though they know nothing of what you and I know, as to my relations with your father—might they not be slightly amused at your talk of unfair pressure? Yet here am I, begging like a dog for a kind word!"

"But why?" she cried, releasing his arm that she might wring her hands together. "You won't tell me why?"

"I have given reasons, but I'll hand you out just one more. It's because you're an honest girl, and I've been too often up against the other kind not to know honesty when I see it. By the way, don't you think it's rather to my credit that I should be so sure of your honesty? Circumstances might tend perhaps to make me suspicious of your father's daughter. But I'm ready to go nap on you, Jass. You see, I am still being odious—putting my own side of the case. But I think you are generous enough to own that I have to do some trusting. Isn't it fair that I should ask for a little trust from you too? So I say again—trust me, please."

She clasped and unclasped her helpless hands. "I



'don't—I don't know what you mean by that," she stumbled.

"I mean," he replied, in a voice which some emotion made nearly inaudible, "that you would be quite safe with me."

He was sitting sideways towards her, on the sofa, one of his arms along the back of it. As he said these words she lifted to him a look as timid, as wistful as that a robin in a garden gives, wondering if it dare hop one step nearer the digger. As he met that plea, his whole face melted and changed, flooded with a compassion so tender that it blotted out all likeness to the man as she had known him.

"Oh, you poor little soul! Poor little driven creature," he said remorsefully; and in saying it he put out both his arms and drew her near to him with the kindness of a comforting big brother. He attempted no kiss, his clasp was not passionate, but protective. Opening his left hand, he showed her shining in the palm a wonderful ring. It was an aquamarine of the purest blue, as large as a haricot bean, and set in small brilliants.

"Look," said he, "I found it among my father's things—put away in a little box by itself. It must have been my mother's, I suppose, though I don't remember her wearing it. I want to put it on your finger. Let me. You must let me. You are going to marry me, Jass."

They were both so absorbed in the moment, that neither had heard the sound of an arrival in the hall. It was a complete surprise to both when Nora opened the door and announced "Mrs. Grice."



## CHAPTER XIX

### IPHIGENIA

**O**H!" cried Mrs. Grice as she entered, elaborately ignoring the pose in which she had detected the two, "good evening, Jacynth dear; are you all alone? Why, what *has* become of the girls? I haven't had a moment all day to run round and ask after your father, so I thought I'd make a dash now. Mr. Warristoun, I declare! I believe you're on the same errand!"

Her ready words and her whole demeanour assured Jacynth that she had been perfectly aware, both that her sisters were not at home, and also of the squire's visit, and the exact time that he had been in the house, alone with the youngest Miss Pennant!

Warristoun had risen at the lady's entrance, but without relinquishing his hold upon Jacynth's hand, which he retained so firmly that she could have disengaged it only by a very obvious pull. He placed the sumptuous ring carefully upon her finger before he spoke.

"Well, Mrs. Grice, you are always a welcome visitor, but if ever there was a moment when I could have done without you, perhaps it was just now. However, I know what a great friend you are here, so I'm glad you should be the first person to wish us joy. Will you congratulate us?"

It took a great deal to dumbfounder Kitty Grice, but this coolness did for a minute reduce her to utter *silence*. She forced a smile, she held out her hands,

but for a long minute she was literally unable to articulate. So this was what it all meant! . . .

The whole village was agog with the news of Captain Monkland's departure, with surmises as to the nature and cause of his indisposition. Now Mrs. Grice had succeeded triumphantly in tracking that mysteriously sudden indisposition to its source. Little Jacynth had refused him! There could be no doubt. She had refused him because she had the prospect of something better. She had played for Warristoun himself, and she had secured him! Oh, these demure ones! They are always dangerous! . . .

It took Kitty but a few flashing seconds to discern that her whole future position in Estongarth would depend largely upon the terms on which she stood with the mistress of the Place. She burst into a torrent of felicitations, warmly kissing and embracing Jacynth; who by this time felt as passive as a dead leaf in the grip of an October gale.

The astute lady's view of the situation was true enough; but there was also a real sense in which the bride might be dependent upon the goodwill of the Dale; and the thought had presented itself to Ranulf the moment his eyes fell upon the avid, questing face of Kitty Grice. To take her at once into confidence, to greet her as the first in the secret, was to enlist her partisanship because her vanity was gratified. Not only had his rapidly moving brain designed a way to publish the news far and wide, and so chain Jacynth to the bargain, he had also prepared a staunch ally for the unexpected bride. Kitty would in future indignantly repudiate any suggestion that Jacynth was a designing minx, but would avow how she from the first had been struck by her inexplicable charm.

The moment had been critical; the lover's prompt *action had wrested it entirely to his own advantage.*

Kitty's special pride was in her own tact. Having ascertained all that she came to discover, she knew better than to stay on, at a moment when she was manifestly superfluous. With warmest expressions of regard she took her leave, and in a state of wild excitement ran home across the green to put on thicker shoes, in order to hasten to intercept Doss and Margie on their homeward way, and pour into their amazed ears the great news.

"So Matron was of course acting under his orders, in asking those two dear blind bats to supper! Giving him a clear field! He knows what he wants, and no mistake!" she reflected with admiration.

Hardly had the door closed behind her when Ranulf said—not domineeringly, but as though there could be no question of Jacynth's resistance: "Come upstairs. We must set Pennant's mind at rest at once, and get it over before your sisters' return."

As for Jacynth, it seemed almost as though his ring on her finger were exerting some spell which held her incapable of independent action; for she went up with him, his hand placed lightly beneath her elbow as they ascended, with no further protest than:

"Oh, this is madness!"

"I shall go in and tell him," announced her suitor, when they reached the door. "You shall follow and confirm it, when I'm gone. I'm in a bit of a rush, so I can't stay more than a minute—I must be off home and despatch letters and telegrams." Thereupon he shut his *fiancée* out in the passage, and went alone into the agent's room.

His conduct was so staggering, that at first Jacynth could not determine what line of action to adopt. By the time she had decided that at all costs she must go in and make a protest, the door once more opened, and *Ranulf* emerged, looking both pleased and triumphant.



"That's done it, I think," declared he with satisfaction. "Well, now I'm off, so I must bid you good-night. When I think of what we have to get through, my head swims." She sank down—for her knees were shaking—on an ottoman which stood on the landing, and stared blankly up at him. He returned the gaze with a mind evidently fixed on other things. "Let me see, what will be our best plan? Perhaps a ride—yes, that's it. Will you ride with me to-morrow afternoon? We must have a talk, you know, and I can see you're not fit for it now. I know I've given you about as much as you can stand. But there is a lot for us to settle, and we could talk as we rode. I must go up to High Crag and give Joyce the news." He smiled suddenly. "In present circumstances I don't think you need be afraid to leave one of your sisters in charge of the patient. He won't try to shoot himself now." He took out his watch. "Would two o'clock be too early for you? Can you be ready if I bring round the horses then? I want you to have Sir Douglas for your own if you like him."

He was travelling at such a pace that she could only gasp. He carried her along as dust is whirled onward by the motion of a chariot. He assumed so much that one hardly knew where to begin to contradict him. He had apparently planned out the whole future in his head, and having, by his handling of Mrs. Grice's intrusion, adroitly forced Jacynth to seem as if she accepted the situation, he evidently considered the battle won.

But she could not let him remain under this impression. "There is indeed a great deal to settle," said she in tones which she meant should express volumes. "I can't see my way clear to-night. You think you have *cut away the ground under my feet by telling Mrs.*

Grice that we are engaged, when you know that we are not——”

“My dear girl, she found you in my arms. What could I do? Did you expect me to grin and tell her it was only my fun?”

“I don’t know what I expected. It was very awkward, but that isn’t enough excuse for the way you have ridden rough-shod over—over everything. However, I will think things over, and I shall be better able to talk to you to-morrow . . . when I have had time. . . . Yes, I had better ride with you.”

“That’s my brave girl,” said he contentedly, ignoring the whole of what she said, except what he wished to hear. “Now run along and kiss your father. By the way, just one precaution.” He lowered his voice and bent down towards her. “You realise the state he’s in—how careful you have got to be? He asked me, expressly, if you were happy in this. See? You must realise that he wouldn’t for a minute accept the sacrifice of your happiness. You’ll remember that, won’t you? He’ll refuse his reprieve if you give him the least hint of your unwillingness.”

She bit her lip, staring before her through a glaze of tears. “Yes, I realise that. It is your strong card, isn’t it?”

“It’s one of ’em, but not the only one by a very long way,” he replied, turning away and going to the stairs with no further leave-taking. “I shall play my hand as I see fit, and I’m bound to lose a few tricks at first; but as we go on—you’ll see! Well, two o’clock, then.”

Jass sat listening to his departure, hearing the door close behind him with a dim wonder as to who she was and why she was there. It was the oddest feeling—the consciousness of a disturbed identity. She thought of Warristoun with a curiosity approaching bewilderment. What was his motive? He had openly con-



fessed that he wished to marry her for reasons which did not, at present, appear. The most likely of these would seem to be pique—a desire to wound Adela Belairs. It could hardly be attachment to herself. Nothing in his usual conduct had suggested such a thing. Yet that he was, in some strange sort, her friend, she could not but believe. Her own feeling for him was not to be brought to the bar of analysis. Her fancy had been occupied with the image of another, very different man—a man who had, as she thought, abandoned her, left her to the comment of the inquisitive and the talkative, for reasons which she considered despicable.

She was in a trap; she told herself that it had not yet closed, that she might and could struggle out again . . . yet, as she turned the handle of her father's door, she knew that the succeeding moments must be decisive. If he should question her, if he should give her a loop-hole, she would snatch the chance and tell him of the coil that bound her. Anything, anything would be better than this shameless bargain! Her father and she could begin the world over again, together. They would cross the sea, go to Australia, make a new life for themselves!

Strength flowed in upon her at the thought. Words rushed to her tongue. She opened the door impetuously, and hastened to the bedside.

. . . Words failed her as she encountered the eyes glowing upon her from the pillow.

"Come to me, darling," murmured Pennant, extending his free arm. She paused a moment, feeling as if drowning in the solemn ecstasy which awaited her. Then she moved forward, mute, conquered; and as he drew her to his breast, the waves seemed to go over her head. . . .

. . . *He was whispering, sobbing, smiling. "I knew*

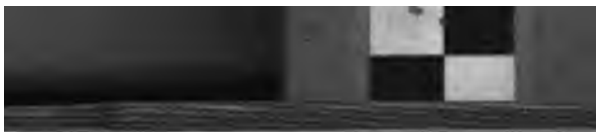
it! From the first moment I saw you, and you spoke to me with your mother's honey tongue. I knew you belonged to her world and would go back there. He's—a bit rough, yes; but he's worth a dozen of the other—young Monkland. I wouldn't say anything to you, because Monkland too belongs to your world, and if you had a fancy for him I thought you might be the making of him. But I'm glad—glad to the heart he's not the man. Warristoun has a generous nature. God bless him! He said to me, 'When a man's as happy as I am he's not likely to be hard on others.' He hasn't been hard on me. . . . There were reasons, darling, why he might have been. But he was not. And he shall never repent it. I swear, by your mother's face, that from this moment I devote myself to his service. I'll never touch drink again, as long as I live. Think I'd disgrace my little girl? *Mrs. Warristoun, of Estongarth Place.* . . . I thank my God He has let me live for this! . . . I'm not an old man; there's good work in me yet. I look forward to days to come. I may live to see your children playing in the park, or riding their ponies down the Great Avenue."

The hoarse voice broke utterly under the weight of his emotion; and Jacynth knew that, whatever the future might hold for her, the die was cast now.

It was simply out of her power to destroy this illusion.

"Why," she wondered, "didn't I speak when Kitty Grice first rushed in? Why did I let him have his way then? How could I tell that those few seconds, in which I didn't act, were going to make the difference for all my life?"

The tears she shed did not suggest to her father that she was unhappy. He was shedding tears himself, and he put them down to the rush of feeling suitable to the occasion.



"When first I saw you, lass of mine," he whispered presently, "there at the railway station, I was in the grip of seven devils. Sometimes I have thought I would tell you about it, but now, thanks to Warristoun, I never need . . . and the first sight of your face was as if your mother came back and said, 'Now, Joe, hold out your hand—I've come to lift you out of the pit!' . . . Remember how you said, up at Cauldron Snout, that you and she together would be strong enough? You were right about that! Right indeed!"

He was smiling beatifically, as his hands strayed over her hair and he talked on in snatches.

"*Warristoun!* It seems impossible! I never dreamed of it! Thought you didn't get on. When you tried to tell me, this afternoon, that I was on the wrong tack, and you were not so hard hit as I supposed, I thought it was just bluff . . . believing all the time that it was Monkland your heart was set upon. . . . Poor chap! I suppose he went away this afternoon because he knew—because he understood that he had no chance."

And this, very naturally, was the conclusion to which the entire Dale immediately jumped. The sudden exit of Hector must be the disappearance of the supplanted suitor; and this surmise was greatly strengthened by the information which Mrs. Grice somehow obtained from the post-woman—namely, that Miss Jacynth Pennant had been on the watch for her when she called at Free Croft on the morning after Brough Hill Fair, and had given her a note to carry with the rest of the mail to the Grange—a note addressed to Captain Monkland.





## CHAPTER XX

### AN ENGAGEMENT IS ANNOUNCED

MISS BELLAIRS stood upon the doorstep of the Grange. She was about to start for a drive in her car, taking a party of officers with her; but at the last moment d'Aubigny, the chauffeur, had discovered something which needed the least touch of adjustment—something not quite in that state of perfection which his meticulous care demanded.

Pearson fetched a deck-chair from the hall and made the lady sit down while the operation was performed. They were all in good spirits; for after many days of broken, cold weather, the sun was once more shining, though there was now unmistakably the tang of autumn in the air.

Lady Monkland came out to know what was delaying them; and she too lingered to enjoy the sunshine, warm upon the south front. It pleased her to hear Adela laugh. The young lady's moods had been anything but dependable of late, though Ranulf had been much at the house during the days which intervened between Brough Hill Fair and Hector's departure. Adela and Ranulf, between them, had persuaded the young man to withdraw. That much seemed clear. But that Miss Bellairs was anything but content with the attitude of Warristoun towards herself, was also obvious to the watchfulness of Aunt Bessie, who now surveyed the stooping figure of the young Frenchman *with some impatience*. She did not like d'Aubigny,



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who, in her opinion, made his devotion to his mistress too obvious. It was hard to say exactly how or why this was so. He certainly never voiced his sentiments. But his adoration was like an atmosphere enveloping everything—so patent that the convalescents laughed and joked about it. Adela never seemed to notice it. She was uniformly indifferent to all those whom she regarded as her social inferiors, hardly deigning to know that they were present; and her manner to d'Aubigny showed no variation from this. She gave him an order as though she threw a bone to a dog. He received it like the accolade of knighthood.

"Come," said her ladyship, "why are you not off? You will be losing the sunshine if you don't set out at once. It's a longish run to Raby."

As she spoke, there sounded the teuf-teuf of a motorcycle, and Warristoun came into sight round the corner of the house, and waved his hand as he slowed down. He evidently, like the rest of the company, was in good spirits.

"Hallo!" cried he, dismounting. "What an assembly! Are you just off, Adela?"

She turned a radiant face to him. "We are going for a run," said she—"as far as Raby—at least, that was our intention. Do come with us, Ran. We can give you petrol if you haven't enough."

"Thanks very much, but I haven't time," replied the squire, shaking hands all round. "I'm in a regular rush, and came up to tell you all about it. The fact is, I have been in communication with the French Government ever since I got back here—you know I was in the German lines for about fifteen days before I did a get-away across No-man's land. While I was there I came across something which I thought might be turned to our advantage by somebody who could talk French and German; and they've given me the job."

There was a chorus of comment. Questions were asked, and Adela turned rather pale.

"Do you mean that you are going away again?" she asked quickly.

"May get my marching orders any minute," he replied, smiling. "I'm glad of it, too. But meantime, it's a bit awkward, because I have just got engaged to be married, and I mean to have the knot tied before I depart. That means the day after to-morrow by special license. So I came to tell you all, because of course I should like you to be present at the ceremony."

For a long moment after this announcement nobody spoke. Miss Bellairs had laid down her gloves and vanity bag upon the stone balustrade, and she turned, bending down to unclasp the bag and busying herself with its contents. Her aunt, glancing apprehensively towards her, stepped into the breach, and said in a rallying voice:

"Is this a joke, Ranulf?"

He smiled, openly. "No, I don't think marriage is a joke," was his reply. "I am most seriously engaged, and do most seriously intend to be married immediately."

"This is most surprising—and, of course, most interesting. Do we know the bride?"

"Yes, and I think you like her, which pleases me. It is the youngest Miss Pennant—the one they call Jacynth."

"Nonsense, Ran!" cried Cousin Bessie sharply.

"Nonsense? Why nonsense?" asked he, knitting his brows. "Why do you say that? Why should it be nonsense?"

"You—you haven't been long acquainted with the young lady, have you?"

"I first saw her on the 14th of this month. I determined that same day—or rather, on the evening of



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that same day—that I would marry her if I could. Since then, I have been with her a good deal. We have ridden together most days, duly chaperoned by her father. I think I know her pretty well.”

“Well,” cried Pearson with eager politeness, “I hope you’ll let me offer hearty congratulations, sir! Miss Jacynth Pennant is a charming girl, and I think you’re a lucky man.”

Everyone now joined in the chorus; questions were asked and plans discussed. Adela had several minutes in which to pull herself together after the blow, and she was summoning her pride to the rescue of a heart whose wound, she feared, was mortal.

While her intelligence had, from the first minutes of seeing him again, warned her of Ranulf’s contemptuous indifference, her inclination had whispered persistently that Ran was punishing her—he was “taking it out of her” before returning to her feet as the lover he had so vehemently, in old days, declared himself to be.

The five years of the war had turned him from a reckless boy into a stern, hard man, one who had come through adversity and peril. He was a thousand times more attractive to her in his new guise.

In the stunning agony of this public proclamation of his allegiance to another and his insulting indifference to herself, she lost for a few minutes all sense of reality. Her hold upon herself was slipping. Just as she felt that her self-command might give way utterly, and that she must go into the house or be seen to burst into tears, she happened to catch the eye of d’Aubigny. He stood there beside his car and said not a word. Neither could she interpret the message of his glance. But something in it keyed her up to defiance. He expected of her that she would show herself unconquered.

“*All happiness, Ranulf,*” said she, breaking into the

talk and holding out her hand. "This is tremendous news for the Dale. What a difference it will make, hereabouts! When did you say the ceremony is to take place?"

"To-day's Tuesday," replied Ranulf. "I hope to be married on Thursday. The doctor says that Pennant may go to church that day and give away the bride. My future sisters-in-law are most capable young women, and will do all they can to get things ready."

"Quick work!" cried Pearson admiringly, "but you'll never find those two behindhand! I say, Miss Bellairs, I think you had better drop me out of the car as we go through the village. I am sure to be wanted at Free Croft for something or other. I must hang up strings of flags, or prepare coloured lamps! The master of the Place mustn't get married without due pomp and circumstance, even though it is a hurried affair."

"My future wife doesn't like ostentation," said Ranulf, "but I have warned her that the villagers and tenantry have their feelings, too, and must be more or less considered."

He spoke with a quietness of pride, a ring of confidence which pierced Adela to the very heart. Lady Monkland looked at him in bewilderment. She saw, as she thought, quite clearly now, his urgent reason for wishing Hector out of the way; and she wondered over the whole proceeding. If he were going, as he suggested, upon an expedition which must be a dangerous one—why this haste to be married? She could imagine that Sir John would most heartily disapprove. He had considered himself the heir of Estongarth for a long time now. The idea that Ranulf was hastening the marriage for this very reason—with the deliberate intention of leaving a son to succeed, in case he never came back—rose to her thought with the celerity of light.



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So that was it! No doubt he resented the assumption that his family was about to die out. He had probably selected a bride who would make no objections to this hasty, hole-and-corner wedding. Adela would have demurred.

In one of those flashes of regret which sometimes descend upon us, Lady Monkland told herself that it was very likely by her own fault that Adela—her poor Adela—was now staggering under this stroke. The Pennants nursed a grudge against the family at Manna-dale, for no better reason than that because her ladyship would not trouble to visit them. She had for long known that old Pennant detested her husband and looked forward with dread to his inheritance of the property, sure that this would mean his own dismissal. There could be no doubt that he had made the fullest use of his present opportunity. The moment the heir returned he had made up his mind that one of his three daughters should become Mrs. Warristoun, and enable him to snap his fingers at Sir John.

Yes. It was all fatally clear. Adela, by her own petty personal dislike or jealousy of Jacynth, had been moved to help in taking Hector out of the way, and had thus contributed to her own downfall. If she had left him to monopolise the girl, she would have been free to try her chance with Ranulf. Aunt Bessie had never thought it a good chance. From the first she had suspected that, whomsoever Warristoun might marry, it would never be his fickle first love. Yet Adela was supremely attractive, and devoted to him into the bargain—anything might have been possible, could she have let Hector's romance alone!

. . . It was but a few days since the aunt and niece had argued the point. "Why," her ladyship had wished to know, "should Hector not marry this girl? She is of good family on one side, and she is moreover a girl



of strong character. She might do a good deal with him."

"Aunt Bessie, I will not have those Pennant girls in the family! I tell you it is out of the question. Ranulf feels just the same about it. He told me so."

In fact, it had been he who was foremost in the removal of Hector . . . and now—this! . . . Adela was called upon to stand there in face of all these young men, with the strong light beating down upon the scene, and listen to the pronouncement of her own doom. . . .

"It would surely be better to wait for your marriage until you return from this mysterious mission, Ranulf," said Lady Monkland, unable to keep disapproval from her voice.

Something in Ranulf's answering smile enraged her. It was as though he saw many good reasons why she should wish to delay his marriage, and knew a trick worth two of hers.

"No fear, Cousin Bessie. I have had enough of waiting. Now I am going to take time by the fetlock, as our farrier used to say. I am going into danger, and I mustn't forget that at present I'm the last of my race."

This was hard hitting, and she had no more to say.

The chauffeur had for some time completed his manipulation of the car, and had been standing as if awaiting orders. Now he moved quietly round to where his mistress stood, and said in a low tone:

"Tout est fini. Est-ce que M<sup>adame</sup> veut partir?"

Adela started slightly, and gave a tiny shudder, as though some awful dream were cut through by his gentle words. She gazed upon him blankly. "Tout est fini," she echoed . . . and then, under her voice: "Finis . . . nous n'irons plus au bois" . . . Why should that sad old song come to her mind? Was she



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thinking of the lost groves in Gatesgarth Wood? "Les lauriers sont coupés—sont coupés," she murmured, as she got quietly into the car.

The others, with the laudable design of covering any mortification the lady might feel at the unceremonious announcement they had just heard, were surrounding Warristoun with chatter and comment. Nobody remarked the adoring care with which d'Aubigny disposed the cushions and rugs for the comfort of his mistress.

From the noisy group on the doorstep Warristoun detached himself and, glancing round, saw Adela and came to bid her good-bye. As he descended the steps he became, in some curious way, enormously aware of d'Aubigny.

"Well, I must be off; I've something to get through between this and Thursday," said he. "Ha! There's my friend d'Aubigny of the useful alibi! d'Aubigny, I fancy I owe you a good deal! If you can think of any way in which I could pay it, let me know!"

Lifting his cap, he turned quickly away, leaped on his cycle, and was off in a moment.

The Frenchman gazed after him with a look which it was well only Miss Bellairs remarked. His lip was curled back, showing his teeth, and he muttered a word—so low that even Adela could hardly be sure that she heard it.

*"Scélérat!"*



## CHAPTER XXI

### NO RETREAT

**T**HE bridegroom had indeed much business to transact. He had sent down a car to Bircastle that morning to fetch his lawyer; upon his return from Mannadale he found that the lawyer had arrived; and there followed long and complicated business arrangements, connected with the drafting of a will.

The squire possessed, however, within his quaintly miscellaneous mental make-up, an extraordinary capacity for coming to the point. He had completed his instructions, and given his lawyer an excellent lunch, in time to make his appearance before the windows of Free Croft punctually at two o'clock, mounted on Black Prince, and leading Sir Douglas.

It was not his first appearance that day at the abode of his lady love. He had turned up there quite early in the morning, in order to adopt, with complete success, the same tactics towards his future sisters-in-law which had proved so effectual in the case of Mrs. Grice.

That is to say, he enlisted them at once as his helpers and allies, laying his plans before them, and throwing himself as it were upon their kindness.

He found them both more than willing. Doris, it must be admitted, had based hopes for herself upon the foundation of the squire's frequent visits. These proving baseless, she was quite sensible enough to grasp instantly the advantages for all the family which must accrue from the present state of affairs. There was no need to dot i's or cross t's in dealing with Doss, if it



was a question of material advantage. She saw the desirability of an immediate wedding as clearly and promptly as Lady Monkland had seen the contrary.

They had a long talk, and the bridegroom declined even to see the bride-elect, "because, you see, I am rushing her a bit, and it's just as well not to give her the chance to raise objections. We must just manage things over her head," he had laughingly remarked; and with this sentiment they were both in sympathy.

They took everything for granted. Mrs. Grice had saved Jass all necessity of announcing the news herself, and they themselves supplied all the suitable emotions and ecstasies. Such an idea as their sister's unwillingness never floated before their minds for an instant.

When Ranulf rode up that afternoon, his arrival was watched from the window of Pennant's room. That morning, with Dr. Grice's leave, the patient had been allowed to leave his bed, and, was seated in an easy chair, whence he could watch the amazing spectacle of his little girl riding away with her distinguished lover.

His whole demeanour had so changed since the previous day, it was hard to realise that he was the same man. The sight of his face, when he awoke that morning, and applied for confirmation of the truth of what had happened—for assurance that it was not a dream—had made Jass feel that nothing else mattered.

When she saw the horses, and the exultant rider, she stooped to her father's curly head and kissed him as though she could draw strength from the knowledge of his gladness. He was to be left in charge of Margie, Doss having hastened by the first available train into Darlington to make sundry indispensable purchases; and the new nurse declared she would dress up in Jass's cap and apron, so as to extort due respect for her authority!

"He's some hustler, that young man of yours, Jass."



she remarked, with a farewell hug. "I don't wonder that you hardly know whether you're on your head or your heels! Off with you now, and don't keep him waiting—he's looking at his watch already!"

Jass went downstairs with slow feet that would not hasten. Ran saw her emerge from the porch and called an apology for being unable to leave his horses. He had the air of being in such desperate haste that there was no time for smiles or glances. He just took her in his arms and placed her in her saddle under the eyes of the keenly watching pair upstairs; and Jacynth seconded his efforts by achieving a gay smile and wave of the hand when mounted. She even maintained that smile, or an echo of it, in position, until they were safely past the batteries of the Grice windows, and were turning their backs upon the village and all prying eyes.

But when the first dip in the ground shut them off and they looked out upon the empty moor, the words she had meant to say would not come. There was a lump in her throat, and all about her a sense of nightmare—of struggling with the intangible, which held her speechless.

"Well, how goes it?" he ventured presently.

She plucked up her courage. "So far," said she, "there has been nothing for me to do or say. You have taken all the arrangements out of my hands——"

"Yes," he replied, "that, I thought, was the least I could do, since I am obliged to speed things up so atrociously."

"It is atrociously. I am glad you see that. I am informed by my sisters that you have decided to be married on Thursday."

"Yes. I'm afraid that's the latest possible minute."

"Well, I am sorry to interfere with your arrangement, but——"



"Yes, I'd be sorry too, to have you interfere. In fact, as regards the date of the ceremony, I'm afraid you'll have to let that rest. You see——"

"No, I don't see. I can't see. I have not consented, I have not given you this authority; I am not prepared to marry you like this! In short, Mr. Warristoun, please, we must have this out."

"Sorry," was his immediate reply, "but we can't do that now. We have too much else to think of and arrange. As soon as we are married we will have things out; but not yet."

Her colour rose and her eyes grew hard. "Are you going to decline to listen when I speak? Because I mean to speak!"

"Not quite that: but I want you to defer speaking."

"Till it is too late!"

"Too late for what?"

"For drawing back——"

"But it's too late for that now."

She was silent a while, digesting the calm assertion. He continued:

"I cycled to Mannadale this morning and gave them the news, including the date of the wedding. I also saw your father for a few minutes . . . and—and—well! as you said this morning, he is my strong card. He is what makes it too late for drawing back now. And if that is true, and you've got to marry me, why not Thursday as well as any other day?"

She saw she must change her tactics. "It is really from another point of view that I ask you to—to go slow," said she haltingly. "I think you do not quite understand. In my confusion last night I failed to explain myself clearly; I had no chance to confess what is unfortunately the truth. . . . I should not like you to be able to say, afterwards, that I had not made my own attitude in the matter quite plain. . . ."

"Well," he replied indulgently, "if it will ease your mind, make your attitude quite plain."

She answered: "It's just this. I shall be marrying you only because I can't help it. If I could get out of the bargain at this moment I would do so. What prospect of happiness does that allow you?"

"You may change your mind," he returned undauntedly. "I'm building on that. Because, you see, you don't know the whole truth of the matter, and I do."

"You really seriously believe . . . Oh, can you assure me, solemnly, as before God, that you believe you will be able, after we are married, to put before me considerations that may—and will——"

"Jass, I can't promise to put before you considerations which will turn you and me into lovers. But I think I *can* promise that you will be able to forgive me, one day—perhaps not yet—for making you marry me. I know I'm putting on unfair pressure. I've simply got to. Won't you leave it at that?"

She found the talk so difficult that she had to wait a moment before feeling sure of being able to control her voice. At last—

"You accept that responsibility?" she asked. "You risk finding yourself landed for life with a woman who detests you——"

"With a woman who misunderstands me," he cut in swiftly. "Yes, I am taking that responsibility. Because it's you. And you are different. I may be making a criminal blunder. But I'm going on with it. And you must go on with it, too. So if you please, we'll not argue about it any more, it's only going round in a circle, and you have made your attitude quite plain. What I want to discuss now is our plan of action. Have I your leave?"

He waited some time for a reply. It came at last



with a rush of tears. "I've warned you. What more can I do?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid, except resign yourself to a few days' discomfort. It won't be much longer. I haven't got my orders yet, but I don't expect you'll have to stand me much more than a week, so cheer up. I'll try and be as little detestable as I can. I'm a lamb when I have everything my own way. So now that's settled, and we can get on to some of what I want to say. We must be married in the forenoon on Thursday, because we have to catch a train at Penrith at three o'clock. We shall motor over the summit to Appleby in a Government car and travel all the way down to Plymouth—I've got the whole route planned out here——"

"Plymouth?" she threw in faintly. Had he said Kamchatka she would hardly have left surprised.

"Yes, we are to embark there. But what I am going to tell you now is between you and me. I don't want anybody else to know. I am going to take you to my place in Brittany—to Château Kerlistec."

"But you can't!" she cried, while there crossed her mind a wonder as to whether this man were in reality slightly insane. "This is war-time! You can't go to France when you choose! And if you could, you could not take me!"

"Oh yes, I can," he replied calmly. "I am going to do a bit of Government work, and before starting upon it I have applied for a few days' leave to go out to visit my hospital—did you know I had turned the Château into a hospital?—and to take out a nurse with me. I hope you won't mind bringing your uniform along, as you will have to make the crossing in it. I'm afraid the first forty-eight hours of your married life will be spent in continuous travelling. But Kerlistec is a restful place when you get there."

She made a sound of piteous protest. "You want me to go away, out there, alone with you, away from everyone I know, or care about——"

Terror was audible in her strained voice, visible in her suddenly whitened cheeks. Warristoun turned towards her, laying a hand upon her saddle, and his voice was kind, but very commanding.

"Steady now! Don't cry out before you are hurt. I am taking you there chiefly because I want you to know my only friends—the sole creatures I really care about in all this old world—the Stricklands. Have you ever heard of them?"

"Yes, yes, I have. Dad told me something about them. They used to live here?"

"Before the war, yes. Since, they have been in charge of my hospital. Agatha has run it marvellously. She's more like an angel than a woman. If only she would have consented to become my stepmother I might not have been such a—well, I might have been a different kind of chap, perhaps. She was right, of course; the poor old governor was no mate for such as she. But if she could have stooped. . . . However, refined women, such as she and you, don't fancy stooping, do they? . . . If it hadn't been war-time, of course, I would have asked old Walter to marry us. But even if we had time to fetch him he wouldn't find it easy to leave. So I must take you to them."

"It sounds to me . . . so crazy," she expostulated faintly.

"I'm sorry the idea doesn't please you. You know I rather fancied that it would. You have never felt yourself at home here, I know. I mean, you always seem to me like the swan among the ducks; Mrs. Grice and Co. are not your sort. But the Stricklands would be. And the place is rather jolly, too—if you like that *kind of thing*."

As he spoke, Jacynth was perceiving that the headlong-sounding plan had its merits. What she had heard of the Stricklands was attractive. And there would be the additional advantage that she would be able to pass through the ordeal of her early married life without the fear of prying eyes. She could hide her misery away from everyone.

"Perhaps," she said, as he seemed to expect her to make a remark of some kind, "perhaps it will be the best thing, after all. It doesn't really matter where I am. Since it seems I am committed to this—this marriage—to make difficulties about details is simply straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel."

"Very sensible," he replied, by no means harrowed, as she had hoped he might be, by the despairing nature of the avowal.

They had been ascending the Dale, until now they were close to a point where a heathery track, branching from the road, leads to the summit of Goldborough Stack. Suddenly Ranulf said:

"I say, let's ride to the top, shall we?"

The tone was so keen and boyish, that Jacynth turned to look at him, and met his eyes, full of that new look of sympathy and understanding which she had first seen the previous night, just before Mrs. Grice's settlement of the question. The exhilarating air was filling the girl's lungs, and the sun poured down upon the wild land. Somehow her despair left her, and she nodded assent to his suggestion.

They set their horses galloping over the smooth expanse of grassy land before the ascent began.

Yesterday's sunshine had done something to dry the heather, and they had good going. It seemed as if they were very quickly at the top. They reined in their horses and stood side by side, the keen air singing past *their ears*, as they gazed down upon the gleaming



world beneath, and the shadows of the little clouds scudding over the heather and making it look like a shoaling sea.

"The sea at Kerlistec," remarked Ranulf musingly, "often looks like that. Full of purple patches, like a modern novel. You will admire it, I really think. The patches are caused by the *goémon*, a kind of seaweed that floats in masses."

He fell silent, and there was no sound but the creak of leather and champ of bit as the two spirited horses moved under them. "Not bad country, is it, Jass?" said the man half shyly. "As far as we can see, pretty much, is our own property." She made no reply, and after a while he broke silence with a sharp—

"God! What it would be to be here—to-day—with you—if only you didn't detest me! Fate doesn't send minutes such as that would be!"

"You could soon make me cease to detest you."

He suddenly laughed. "By letting you escape? Thanks. Not me. Why, I'd sooner——" he broke off the sentence. "Sorry, I ought to have known better than to give you an opening like that. Come! Let's ride down and get on, or we shall be late for tea, and Mrs. Joyce's griddle cakes will be spoilt."



## CHAPTER XXII

### CHÂTEAU KERLISTEC

THE sun was dropping rapidly towards his western immersion in the shining sea that washes the northern coast of Brittany, in those remote districts known as *La Basse Bretagne*.

It shone upon the fangs of the granite barrier which defends that fair land from the pleasure steamer; upon an expanse of white sand, just left bare by the retreating tide; upon a small village, irregularly planted upon the shelving cliffs; and upon the mellow sixteenth-century walls of Château Kerlistec, its pleached walks and Italian garden.

Half-manor, half-farm, wholly lovable, it stood above the village, though almost in its midst, overlooking the sea and the clustered isles.

Many a royalist fugitive had its walls sheltered in the days of the Chouans, and many a boat had put out from those secret shores, carrying the proscribed to England and safety. And after the upheaval of those days, somehow, none quite knew how, the Kerlistecs had regained possession, and had held the old place, without the means to keep it up, until, near the close of the nineteenth century, they had sold it to an Englishman—Ranulf's father.

He had fallen in love with the old-world peace of it, and had made of it a charming holiday home.

This evening, all its doors and windows stood wide to the sun and air; and through the bare, spotlessly clean hall, came a woman in a robe of Madonna blue,

wearing upon her head a butterfly coiffe, such as is common to the women of the Côtes du Nord. She seemed about fifty years old, and her face was one instinct with a loveliness upon which age had no effect. Her hair, softly waving, was almost grey, but seemed the right frame for her noble, tender features. Her complexion was still fresh, her cheeks smooth.

She stood a moment by the carved-stone mantel bearing the shield of the Kerlistecs with all their quarterings, to glance at the clock which hung above. Then she went out of the open door into the sunshine of the mossy, gravelled terrace, and stood there, smiling slightly upon the various invalid *poilus*, sitting and lying about, busy with cigarettes, dominoes, or cards.

"Couchée de soleil—faut rentrer, mes enfants," said she, with her English accent.

There was a chorus of dissent. A short time longer! They had this moment heard the sound of the train! "Monsieur Variston" and his bride were actually in the village by now, and should arrive in a few minutes. They must wait to welcome them.

She gave consent, with that serene half-smile, and suggested that they should range themselves either side of the path, in order that all might have an equally good view of the bride. Then, shading her eyes with her hand, she gazed away down the street, with parted lips and eager eyes.

A grey-headed and incredibly ragged peasant came hastening along, making violent signals. This was old Christophe, the *taupier* or mole-catcher of the district—a reputed seer of visions, and the local news-carrier. He cried that the procession was coming; and in a few moments the sound of voices was audible far away in the distance—whether singing or cheering it was at first difficult to distinguish.

Soon there appeared a cloud of dust upon the road,



and then a few skirmishing *gamins*, leaping and frisking. Next followed a solid row of elderly men—Monsieur le Curé in the midst, the grocer, the postmaster, the shoemaker, the sexton—even Chapuis who kept the Débit de Boisson—all ranged to do honour to the Englishman whose wealth supplied one of the best-found and most comfortable little hospitals in France.

A cluster of women and girls in butterfly coiffes were throwing late roses, dahlias and other autumn flowers upon the roadway and into the motor-car, detailed by the Government for the use of the hospital.

In the car sat the bride and bridegroom, Walter Strickland facing them. He was tall and very thin, but, like his sister, irresistibly charming.

"I'm afraid," he was saying, "that Mrs. Warristoun is finding all this noisy goodwill a little too much for her."

Ranulf laughed. "I must own that I gave her no warning, for I didn't expect it myself," said he, "and she has been travelling without a pause ever since we were married, so it is no wonder if she feels a bit overwhelmed."

Jacynth summoned her spirits and smiled at Strickland. "It is very interesting," said she. "I am glad that they are pleased to see my—husband."

"They have thought, as we all have thought, for the past several years, that Ranulf must be dead," he explained. "They are pleased to know he survives, for he has been a good landlord and they hate changes. They were furious when their Comte sold the old place to a stranger; but Ranulf was here a great deal as a child, and they know him. They would now resent the coming of any new owner."

"Well, my wife will have to see how she likes it," replied Ranulf. "If she doesn't care for the place she

can sell it. I see you've had a difficulty in keeping up the garden—no labour, I suppose, Walter?"

"None at all. The only men left are the old buffers who came to meet you. Sorry if you think it's looking bad."

"Nothing of the kind. You've done wonders to keep it going at all. What a lot of patients! I suppose there are a few rooms not occupied—space enough to accommodate us?"

"After a fashion. It has been quite simply managed, because it is so easy for Agatha and myself to return for the nights to our own cottage; and you have our premises. I hope you've prepared Mrs. Warristoun for rather makeshift quarters? Ah, there is Agatha! She hardly knows how to believe in your being alive! When your telegram came she was fairly bowled over! My word, but it's good to see you—you old fraud!"

The car had stopped at the wrought-iron château gates, and as he spoke Strickland rose, put his hand upon Ran's shoulder, and slightly shook him. The intimate gesture was the signal for a burst of shouting. Ranulf turned to Jacynth, motioning her to stand up, and took off his hat. So they stood, side by side, among waving hands and glad cries. Then Ranulf said something in French—so idiomatic that Jacynth could not catch it; but evidently well understood by the audience, who burst into a delighted roar of laughter. Then they alighted and walked up the steep bit of avenue, with wounded soldiers on either hand, until they came to the terrace and Agatha standing there.

"Look at Agatha! Doesn't she look topping?" said Ranulf in tones of keen appreciation.

"They call her 'La Dame Bleue,'" said Walter, "and they worship her."

There were tears upon Miss Strickland's cheeks as *she* folded her arms about Ranulf's neck, kissing him



as his mother might have done. "God bless you, my dear, dear boy! . . . And now, show me the wife you have chosen."

Ranulf took the hand of the pale girl and put her into Agatha's arms. As she was folded eagerly, lovingly, the bride was suddenly conscious of complete exhaustion. The long strain of the preceding days, ending in this unlooked-for, emotional culmination, was more than she could bear. She dimly heard Ranulf's voice saying: "I felt I must bring her to you—I just had to bring her straight to you. . . ."

And then, for a while, no more.

When she came to herself, nobody but La Dame Bleue was with her.

She had been laid upon the bed in a room with beams across the low ceiling, and furniture which was a quaint blend of old French and Victorian English. Somehow the net result was pleasant. Through the open windows the soft air wafted scents of flowers and of the sea; and the last rays of the sun threw rose-coloured shafts of glory along the beams and moulded plaster of the ceiling.

Agatha was beside her, and was petting her. Her hat and her shoes had been removed, and she was flooded with a sense of comfort and well-being. If this could but last! If she could but remain here with this wonderful lady, and not have to arise and face the embarrassments which confronted her every moment when in her husband's company.

"Better, dear?" said the consoling voice. "I hear you had a wretched passage and no proper sleep. But now you are to have a thorough rest. Ranulf has handed you over to me until to-morrow morning. He is reproaching himself because he says he had to rush you so. Ah, this weird, dreadful war time! We have to do the best we can, don't we? And better even a

few days together than none at all! He is a very wise, as well as considerate, young man! He orders you to sleep for as many hours as you can. . . . But I hope you feel well enough to eat something first?"

"Oh, I can go downstairs and eat," faltered Jass. "I don't want to give trouble, *please!* I am really quite well, you know. Let me get up!"

"It would be of no use, dear, as I will explain. I expect you know more of Ran's movements than I do, but I think he found some orders which he did not expect awaiting him here just now. He has to go to Tréguier to-morrow morning at an unheard-of hour. It means setting off at dawn. So he has decided to go down to the cottage with Walter, my brother, and leave you undisturbed. I know it's hard for you to be parted, but we all have to submit, don't we? And you won't feel strange with me, will you?"

Jass raised her eyes to those which were shedding their tenderness upon her. She knew in a moment that she was going to love Miss Strickland. Ran had known it. . . . How had he known? A new diffidence overcame her.

"Oh," she said, "you must be thinking what an inadequate wife I am for him!"

She was ashamed of the words as soon as uttered, and hid her face in the pillow. Upon her hair she felt the touch of lingering fingers.

"It is to me such a splendid thing that he has found his mate," said the fascinating voice. "I have known Ranulf since he wore sailor-suits and was everlastingly in some serious mischief. The loss of his mother was a tragedy for him. She alone ever understood him. He has been through a great deal, poor lad!"

Jacynth knew not what to say or do. She hoped that her convulsive grasping of the kind hand might be taken to represent the feeling appropriate to the



occasion. It seemed to her like hideous treachery. To seem to accept the situation, with a woman like this woman, was a deception of a very different kind from wearing a bold front towards Mrs. Grice. There was about Agatha something only to be described as spiritual fragrance.

"Well," went on the discerning lady, "you are too tired to talk now, so I will send Maurette to put you to bed. Maurette is quite a treasure, and I am so proud of myself for being able to produce her! She was a lady's maid in Paris in 1914, and left her excellent place to go and make munitions. But her lover was killed, and the shock was too much for her. She broke down, and was sent back to her native village to recuperate. She is practically well now—her trouble is more than a year old—and she is delighted at the idea of waiting upon you."

So saying she rose, went to a door and opened it noiselessly.

"Come in, Maurette. Madame is so tired that there is nothing for it but twelve hours' complete repose. You speak French, Mrs. Warristoun?"

"Yes—oh yes. Not well, but enough to make myself understood."

"Mais, madame parle admirablement!" cried the amiable Maurette, anxious to compliment.

She took charge with the deftness born of experience; and with a sigh of relief Jass resigned herself to ministrations the lack of which had been a big trial to her when first Mrs. Rodney's death left her destitute.

"Understand, Maurette, madame has suffered much from *mal-de-mer*, and is to be quite undisturbed. She will take her supper in bed, and then she is to sleep as long as she can."

Maurette gave a sympathetic murmur of entire com-



prehension: and then the Blue Lady went out, and left Jacynth to her dexterous tendance.

"Ah, Maurette," she sighed, "ever since war began I have been nursing the wounded; and I am now very tired, and glad to be waited upon!"

Maurette thought it no wonder. The war—*cette guerre maudite*—had much to answer for. Ladies had to be married just anyhow! No time for a trousseau! But she herself was fairly quick and clever with the needle, and had a machine which was really a treasure. If madame could produce materials she would at once set to work. What lovely hair madame had! It would truly be a joy to dress it! And now that madame was actually married to the man of her heart, she would soon forget her fatigue. She—Maurette—had not been married, it was terrible to think of! The good God might have given her a tiny son to be a memory of his father. But it was not to be.

"So madame is the happier!" Even though she was to be parted for a while from her husband, at least she would have been his. "And that, madame—to a woman—that is everything, when one loves," said the girl softly.

To this sentiment Jacynth could agree. "Yes—when one loves—that is everything," she replied softly; and then Maurette, recognising that emotion is exhausting, changed the subject and talked lingerie so seductively that Jacynth found herself really interested.

The château might be simple, but she was lapped in comfort. There were rocks ahead, but this evening she could think of nothing but the green and blue and purple sea, the scent of roses and the beautiful face of Agatha Strickland.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE BETROTHAL RING

**I**T was a thing surprising to Mrs. Ranulf Warristoun that she should sleep that night. But she did. In all probability, her natural youth was making assertion of its claims, after successive restless nights. But to her it seemed that Brittany was lapped in a peace which not all her mental disquiet—not all the war which ravaged the world—could avail to disturb.

Between herself and the man who had insisted upon marrying her, there had been no confidential talk—in fact, no talk at all, since the fatal ceremony which united them in the little church at Estongarth.

The necessity of keeping up to the last, of facing the parting with her father—of replying to the congratulations of all and sundry—had keyed her up to a pitch which made a subsequent giving-way inevitable. Her head ached so fiercely that she had been incapable of consecutive speech or thought during their rush across England; and her husband had seemed neither surprised nor resentful. He had not been inattentive, but he had left her alone more completely than she had anticipated. He had, most evidently, not the smallest hope of her comporting herself like a loving bride. It hardly seemed that he wished it.

On board the mysterious craft in which they had made their crossing, she had had a cabin to herself. Nobody had thought of engaging a maid to travel with her; and a stewardess was a thing unknown to the hardy adventurers who manned that vessel!

The sea was rough, and dire sea-sickness made her secure her cabin door and decline the help which Ranulf offered apparently more from a sense of duty than inclination.

The behaviour of the yacht—it seemed to her more like a yacht than anything—during the passage; the weird movements, the low-voiced growling talk—the pauses, the rushes, the gropings and hesitations of progress, which went on all night long—would have prevented any repose, even had she been in an orthodox state of bridal blissfulness.

They went, evidently, in momentary fear of being torpedoed; and in her misery she indulged the thought that it would matter little to her if they were.

She was not of those who recover immediately from the effects of sea-sickness; and when Ranulf came to her door and told her they were in harbour, she was too shaky to do more than creep upstairs, and much too unwell to eat any breakfast.

Physical discomfort naturally deepened her mental suffering.

Now that the deed was actually done, she marvelled more and more how it could possibly have come about—how she could have permitted Warristoun to bear down all opposition as he had done.

It was to her incredible that her father, and still more her two sisters, could be unconscious of her agony of mind. They knew she had been very near an engagement to Hector, yet they took the transfer of her affections absolutely for granted. Had there been one person to hold out a helping hand she would have made her struggle . . . but there had been no one. Had she but known Agatha Strickland! . . .

Up to the moment of arrival in her French home, among her husband's friends, she had studied only her own side of the question—the sacrifice of her own



future. Now that she had met this great lady, whose love for Ranulf was manifest, she began to take into consideration the injustice she had done to him also. True, he had done all in his power to dominate her. She had warned him explicitly, and he had defied her warning. She knew now that she had not done enough. Refusal, blank and positive, without regard to costs or consequences, was her only honest course; and she had not taken it.

Now it was too late. The sale and purchase of Jacynth Pennant was accomplished. The only bright speck in the gloomy prospect was the thought of a brief respite. Ranulf was off upon some errand of his own whose nature was to her as dark as were all his motives. He was wild, moody, unaccountable. She knew about him only the one thing, that he was incomprehensible.

In spite of all which, she slept, and awakened with the knowledge of complete recovery from sea-sickness—opened her eyes to sunshine and Maurette's smiling face, and *café complet* in its most seductive form.

When she came down, the Blue Lady was awaiting her, in the half-darkness of the old hall. She had a newspaper, just arrived, with news so exhilarating that she was radiant with delight. Bulgaria had begged for peace! Turkey must follow suit! and what would be the fate of the Central Powers, bereft of their allies? Full of this absorbing topic, and taking entirely for granted the keen interest Jacynth must feel in anything which brought the end of the war into the region of probability, Agatha lovingly greeted her guest, noted with pleasure her restored looks, and led her out of the house, along the terrace, to a little rectangular sunk garden, enclosed within thick yew hedges. In the centre, upon a grassy space, a stone faun sat in a mossy fountain, chubby hands on knees, head raised and

throat muscles taut, blowing into the sunny air a trickle of sparkling water which fell with a faint musical patter into the basin at his feet.

"This," said Agatha, "is your own special domain, madame! It has always been the pleasance of the ladies of Kerlistec, and I have never allowed the boys to come here. Nobody will disturb you, and you can read or rest—you see, Maurette has put out a chair and plenty of cushions. You won't feel it cold?"

"Cold? No, indeed!" cried Jacynth, laughing. "Please don't take it into your head that I'm an invalid! I am thoroughly rested this morning, and you must give me something to do."

"Not yet," said Agatha, looking at her with interest. "After Ranulf goes we will find you something to take your mind off. But just now you are to make acquaintance with the place, and—I hope—devote yourself to him for a few days. I don't quite know," she went on, in the tones of one who has disagreeable news to break, "how long you hope to keep him, but I have to disappoint you to-day, and I am so loath to do it! I would not tell you last night, because I wanted you to rest. Ah, don't look so startled, it is only that Ranulf cannot be back to-day. He asked me to explain to you. Walter and he looked out all kinds of routes, but he could not arrange it. He must stay in Tréguier to-night, and you must try and live without him until to-morrow."

Hardly knowing how she might be expected to receive this news, Jacynth solved the problem by turning away, walking some steps, and standing gazing down into the basin of the fountain. In a minute or two she felt Agatha's arm about her shoulders, and her sympathetic voice in her ear.

"You poor darling children," she said with breaking voice. "You have no idea how I feel for you both.



Ranulf has told me nothing of his errand, but of course I guess that there is—danger. His knowledge of idiomatic French makes him necessary to the Government, so I understand. He has borrowed a whole uniform of a private soldier, and I am having it altered to fit him. We live in heroic times, dear, but take heart! You are not the only young couple who must snatch a few days of precarious happiness out of this welter of tears and death! And perhaps the whole thing is more wonderful, for that very reason—lifted up into a region of glory which in the old secure world the happiest lovers never knew. Well! thank God Ran brought you here, to me. I will do all I can for you, as you may guess. He is dearer to me than anything on earth."

"You don't think—you are not afraid—that he will not come back to-morrow?" cried Jacynth with a sharpness of inquiry that might well have been dictated by strong feeling.

"Oh no, my dear, I trust not. He has gone now, I believe, to receive his orders. He has said very little to me, but of course you know more than we have heard?"

"I—yes, I suppose . . . I really don't think he knows himself. He will probably hear more to-day," stumbled Jacynth. "It is all so bewildering—it has come so quickly . . . I feel as if I can't think."

"And I ought not to talk to you like this," said Agatha, reproaching herself. "He said I was to keep you happy and not let you fret! And look! Here comes Walter, to take over your entertainment for a while. We're expecting a convoy, either this evening or to-morrow, and there is a good deal for me to see to this morning. With this victorious advance, the casualty lists, alas! show no sign of diminishing!"

Walter greeted the bride cordially, and thought her prettier than he had yesterday evening been inclined to

admit. He suggested that he should take her all over the hospital that morning, and that after *déjeuner* they should walk down to the shore. To both these suggestions she gave a willing assent, ready for anything rather than to be left to her own brooding thoughts; and soon she developed a very genuine interest in exploring the curious old château.

It was not large, neither did it contain any fine rooms. All was on three floors, of which the uppermost had dormer windows. It was built of grey stone, shaped like an L, with a circular tower at the inner angle, holding a staircase. Its English owners had cleared away the farmyard which formerly spread itself unabashed right in front of the windows and had laid out a pretty Italian garden instead. The old kitchen, with its row of box-beds, like rabbit-hutches, all round the wall, was a remarkable and interesting sight to the bride. For more than a century before the Warristouns bought it the château had been used only as a farm, and the entire family, in true Breton style, slept all winter in these berth-like recesses, with a sliding barred panel in front. Between the two most imposing ones was fitted an old grandfather clock, still solemnly ticking out the hours as it had done when the Comte de Kerlistec, notorious Captain of Chouans, had accommodated a whole company of horse within the walls—somehow!

The Stricklands, when they took over management of the hospital, had reserved to themselves one sitting-room on the first floor. It was a corner room, with an oriel window overlooking the sea, and had formerly been the boudoir of the Comtesses de Kerlistec. This room had now been made spick and span for the use of Mrs. Warristoun. Its Louis Seize furniture and panelled walls were still in being; and as Jacynth entered it she took a liking to it at once.



In one of the panels there hung a portrait, in oils, life-size, of a young girl in the costume of about forty years back. This instantly attracted the bride's attention, for the girl had evidently been painted in her wedding-gown. A typically French face and style. Not so much feature beauty as bloom, and charm, and grace. The age could not be much over eighteen.

"Who is that?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh, you are looking at the portrait," said Walter significantly. "Yes, that is very curious. I have said nothing about it to Ranulf yet. I suppose he has not mentioned it to you? I want to know who sent it here—whether he did himself, or whether it comes from the de Kerlistecs."

"From the de Kerlistecs?"

"Yes. That is a portrait of the Comtesse—wife of the Comte who sold the château to your father-in-law. I remember her, though she was some years older than that when I first saw her. She came to this place for the birth of her son—her only child; and remained here a year or two—as it was said, because she could not get on with her husband. He was a horror—old enough to be her father; but they say he was a great wit. Anyhow, he was a close friend of your father-in-law, and while the Comtesse was here in residence they both came for a short visit. . . . I believe the de Kerlistecs have both been dead for a good many years now. As to this portrait, it arrived here by train, in a packing-case addressed to Ranulf, about a year after the war began. We had orders to open anything that came for him, so we unpacked it. There was no message at all with it. I thought we had better hang it up here out of harm's way, and if Ranulf didn't like it when he returned he could take it down again."

"How curious! She must have been a fascinating creature."



"Yes. One was sorry for her, tied to such a husband. These French marriages have too often little to do with inclination. She cared nothing for her poor little boy, so Agatha used to say. I suppose that is likely to be so if there has been no love between the parents."

Jacynth stood motionless before the canvas, her eyes riveted upon a peculiar circumstance. The lady's right hand, in the picture, rested upon the head of a beautiful greyhound seated beside her. Upon the finger of this hand she wore a ring—a large aquamarine, circled with diamonds.

"Were they very intimate—my husband's family and the de Kerlistecs?" Jass asked at length, after some moments of astonished reflection.

"I suppose they were—well, no, I hardly think—the two men were friends; I imagine that Warristoun bought the place largely in order to accommodate the comte, who was hard up. Some said it was the amount of a card-playing debt."

"Is it likely that Mr. Warristoun would have bought the family jewels, as well as the estate?"

"I never heard of his buying any jewels. It is possible, however——"

"I think he must have done." She held out her left hand, upon which she wore, above her wedding-ring, and almost hiding it, the aquamarine and diamond jewel which Ranulf had put on in the presence of Mrs. Grice. "Isn't that rather strange?" she said. "Ranulf told me that he found it among his father's things, after his father's death. He thought it must have belonged to his mother, but could not remember having seen her wear it. I think it is certainly the same, don't you?"

Walter took her hand and carefully compared the two rings. The artist had somewhat elaborated his painting of it, in order to emphasise a note of colour



which was sounded in a bow of ribbon and also, more subdued, in the background of the picture. There seemed no doubt that it was the same—the moulding of the light gold setting which held the gem was peculiar.

Walter flushed suddenly. He gave an odd glance at Jacynth's unconscious face. "Extraordinary," he said, in a voice which was rather carefully indifferent. "No doubt Mr. Warristoun had this ring copied for his own wife. He must have admired it very much; and indeed it is beautiful."

"Is that what you think?" asked Jacynth. "It sounds possible."

"You must ask Ranulf to-morrow," suggested Walter encouragingly; "and there goes the bell for *déjeuner*! How time flies! You are being so brave, and putting up with my dull society so kindly, that to-morrow will be here before you can look round!"

"You and Miss Strickland are being so good to me," said the bride gratefully, "I should be a toad if I didn't respond."

Agatha awaited them in a tiny vestibule which was all that could be allotted to them for meals. In fact, the Stricklands were accustomed to eat with those of the patients who were well enough to come to the *salle à manger*; but as Agatha gaily said, that wasn't good enough for a bride and bridegroom!

The prevalent scarcity was not much felt in that part of the country, and the château was largely self-supporting, like Estondale. The meal was, in consequence, good, and Jacynth was ashamed of her appetite.

The approaching victory of the Allies and the arrival of the new convoy occupied the minds and the conversation of the Stricklands; and thus the subject of the Comtesse's ring passed from Walter's memory and was not mentioned again.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE MAN ON THE SHORE

THE sun lay warm upon the velvet sands when Jacynth and Walter went down to see the shore. In fact, it was so warm that she regretted not having come down before *déjeuner*, and with her bathing costume.

There was not a soul about, and the space below the cliff was strewn with huge boulders, and cleft into recesses which made excellent dressing-rooms. Strickland was pleased to find that she could swim, and would enjoy the sea. He said the water was almost warm there—the land-locked nature of the coast made it shallow, and ideal for bathing.

They walked for some distance, in both directions, until the girl felt quite glad to curl up in the mauve shadow cast by a limpet-cruste rock, and rest.

"It's a pity I can't take you out on the water to-day," he said regretfully, "the tide is just right for pottering among the isles. But my boat sprung a leak, and had to go and be mended. If you would not mind being left for a while, I think I'll walk up to those cottages you see in the distance, and ask whether she is ready. Ranulf is sure to want to take you out to-morrow."

Jacynth was quite willing that he should go. She was in a mood when she craved to be alone, although her mind, the moment it was released from the necessity to occupy itself with externals, went plunging down into recesses of dreadful foreboding.



She had married Ranulf, and he was to leave her soon—to go upon an expedition full of danger, from which he might never return.

In such circumstances she could refuse him nothing.

There was the prospect, in a nutshell. The awfulness lay in the fact that, so far as she could judge, there was no love on either side.

Ranulf had not approached her as a lover. He had been kind to her—he was sorry for her—and, as he confessed, he desired to be married. He had chosen her, it was to be supposed, because he saw a way to exert pressure, and so to execute his design of an immediate marriage without preliminaries.

The face of Sir John Monkland at her wedding, the frozen stiffness of both him and his wife, whom Jacynth had really liked—it had all shown her the motive that underlay the wretched affair. Ranulf wanted to have an heir—to put the Monklands out of the running.

She was the cat's-paw.

It had come to her only slowly and by degrees; but as she sat here alone upon the shore and faced it, she thought it would have been better never to have been born. The whole thing seemed unendurable.

She had consented, she had placed herself in this position. She had no alternative but to go through with it. But her very soul quailed before the ordeal. Soon she felt unable to sit still a moment longer, and she rose and paced to and fro in the shadow of her rock. Then, tempted by the beauty of the tiny shells which lay strewn around by the receding tide, she strayed further, picking one up here and there. Presently, in a clear pool, between three boulders, she saw one of those bivalves, lined with mother-o'-pearl, which the French call an *ormeau*.

It looked so lovely, and was of such an unusual size that she felt impelled to secure it. She unbuttoned her



sleeve at the wristband, rolled it carefully up to her shoulder, and plunged in her hand and arm.

She had forgotten that she was wearing the wrist-watch given to her by her father upon her birthday; it is probable that in rolling back her sleeve she must have touched the clasp; for to her horror the bracelet slipped from her arm and fell to the bottom of the pool, too deep for her to reach it. Efforts to hook it with her stick resulted only in partially covering it with sand.

She was much distressed, for each minute that the delicate mechanism remained submerged was making the damage more serious; and she rose, and ran a little way along the shore, intending if Strickland were in sight, to signal him to make haste.

She did not see him, but she did see, at some distance, a young fisherman in a weather-stained blue jersey, who seemed to be watching her. She waved her hand and beckoned to him imperiously.

He came slouching towards her reluctantly, with no sign in his manner of the eager, welcoming attitude she had so far encountered among the natives. He was a plain, undersized, youngish man, and her first glance gave her a dim impression that she had seen him before. He had probably been among the crowd which welcomed her upon arrival, and the thought reassured her. His present manner was merely shyness, she thought. He said something unintelligible, and she was obliged to ask him to repeat it. As he did so, she realised that this was Breton, not French; and with heightened colour she admitted that she did not understand. Assuming, however, that he would understand French, she told him what had happened, led him to the spot, and showed him the submerged treasure.

He gazed down thoughtfully, nodded, and with care stepped into the pool, boots and all, stooped and re-



covered the watch, which he handed to her with the one French word, "*Abîmée!*" She could not help thinking that he said it triumphantly, as though the idea pleased him rather than otherwise.

She held out her hands joyfully to receive her property; and as she did so, the young man made a curious movement, as though he flinched from the sight of something. Instinctively she glanced downward, thinking he had seen something in the water—Walter had been telling her of the existence of squids in the deeper pools—but she saw nothing unusual; and when she raised her eyes again she thought she must have been mistaken, for his gloomy face was quite impassive.

She drew her purse from the little bag she carried, with the intention of remunerating him. As he divined this, his face grew dark with anger, and he made a gesture of hot repudiation, turning brusquely away and hastening over the sand as if afraid she might importune him.

Jacynth experienced a deep sense of having been snubbed. She was genuinely sorry to have made a false step in her dealings with the native at so early a period in her residence among them. She sat down in the shade, her cheeks still hot, and, taking out her handkerchief, she levered open the watch, and laid it in the sun to dry, touching it delicately where she could perceive moisture.

Lifting her eyes presently from this occupation, she surprised the man, at some distance, in absorbed contemplation of her. It was as though something in her puzzled him. When he found himself observed, he moved, and took up a position behind her, apparently with the design of studying her unseen. She went on with her absorbing task of examining her watch, and after some time looked up again. She could not see him, but, rising rather quickly to her feet, became

conscious that he was quite near to her, having crept up noiselessly.

She wondered what could be his motive. Did he wish to apologise for his rejection of her money, or to resume conversation? It hardly looked like that. More as though he wanted to creep up treacherously. She wondered if he were a little wrong in his head; for he was of an age at which all sound Frenchmen were either in the army or the navy.

As she was wondering what she had better do, to her relief she saw Strickland approaching. She hastened to join him, and immediately turned to point the man out to him. The man was nowhere to be seen.

As he listened to her account of her little adventure, she could see that Walter was puzzled. He knew all the villagers, and there was not, so far as he had heard, any young man home on leave who answered to her description. He moved forward and they looked pretty thoroughly all round and about among the rocks. But the fisherman had taken himself off altogether, and though they called, he did not answer.

"That's an odd thing," said Walter seriously. "He wasn't a ghost, by any chance, was he?"

"I never heard of a ghost getting wet," she laughed. "Look! The mark of his wet, sandy boot is still upon the seaweed."

"Tell me again what he was like."

Jacynth was inclined to laugh. "Surely," said she, "the coast of France is free? They don't have to come to you for leave to walk here, do they?"

"Well, not exactly; but for all that we do know pretty well who walks here," was his reply. "Perhaps he is some new man that the authorities have put on; but in any case, I shall hear if there is a stranger about, from old Christophe; he is sure to know, and sure to tell me the news."



That evening, after supper, Mrs. Warristoun sang and played for the *poilus* and had a great success. When she was at Mauby somebody had given her a volume of Botrel's songs, and also some of the real Breton folk songs. She sang of Reine Anne of Brittany, "Duchesse en sabots," and the blossoming of the verbenæ. And afterwards—

"Si Jésus revenait au monde,"

in her thrilling little voice, like a bird's note; while the emotional Frenchmen crowded round and some sobbed quite audibly in their luxury of melancholy. Hearing the music, a group of villagers assembled among the patients in the gardens. The Marseillaise completed the evening's entertainment, all joining in the chorus; and the villagers marched homeward to its strains, alternately shouting their war-song and pausing to cry in unison at the top of their voices:

"On ne passera pas!"





## CHAPTER XXV

### ONE OR TWO REASONS

JACYNTH went early to bed, for it was now known that the expected convoy would be in at about seven o'clock next morning, and she had induced Agatha to promise that she might help.

Maurette was rather scandalised, though secretly approving, when she was called upon to dress her mistress in uniform, she, a bride of a few days! This indeed was war! . . . But the moment Mrs. Warristoun came among the *infirmières* she showed her ability and her training so clearly that everybody by degrees joined in a chorus of admiration.

By eleven o'clock all the cases had been examined by the resident doctor, an Englishman, and also fed, washed, and bandaged. Agatha said they had never got through so quickly before: and all so well done!

After *déjeuner* Maurette insisted upon obtaining possession of Mrs. Warristoun, changing her dress and making her rest a little, since the return of the bridegroom was looked for that afternoon.

It was not known at what time he would make his appearance, for there were no suitable trains, and he would have to drive some part of the way.

As Jacynth lay upon the couch in her room, a prey once more to the dark thoughts which her work with the wounded had scattered for the time, she heard a sound full of keen reminiscence.

That mellow baritone, so flexible and true, was *carolling* "Oh, my old man's a fireman," as she had



heard it in the churchyard by the lake. With her heart in her throat she sprang to her feet and went to the window. She saw the men hasten from all parts of the garden to meet Warristoun—saw the gate flung open for his entrance, and the glee with which he was greeted. There was a tossing to and fro of army *argot*, laughter and appreciation. He talked to them as one of themselves. She had heard Walter say that he was popular among them, as also among the British Tommies. He was no doubt more in his element among these than with the society of Estondale.

His progress towards the house was slow, and much interrupted, for he stopped to greet each newcomer who joined the group. Jacynth stood long irresolute, hesitating between the window and the door; and finally decided that she must go downstairs and greet him, or risk the suspicions of the Stricklands.

Yet she went so slowly that he had entered the hall before she reached it.

He was standing beside the table, turning over one or two letters which lay there awaiting him; and whistling softly to himself.

As she appeared, descending the black old stairs step by step, he raised his head, ceased whistling, and stood scrutinising her intently as his manner was.

"Hallo!" he said, in a preoccupied sort of voice, "how are you?"

She knew that she turned pale, but she came forward and held out her hand. "I am quite rested, thank you," she replied, as cheerfully as she could, "and the Stricklands have been most kind. I think Kerlistec is a delightful place."

He looked about him at the hall wherein they stood as if he had never seen it before. "You like it?" he said. "I thought you might. And what of them? Do you get on together?"

"It was clever of you to know how much I should like them," she replied heartily. "How *did* you know, by the way?"

"Oh, I don't know"—half absently, his gaze still travelling over her as if noting afresh every detail of her appearance. "You being what you are and they what they are, it wasn't very difficult. . . ."

"Are you hungry? Do you want some food?" she inquired. "There is some all ready laid out for you; we did not know at what time you might come."

"Thanks, I don't want any food. Have they given you a sitting-room here? Some place that we could go and talk in? There's a good deal to say, and not much time."

"There's a dear little room—quite pretty," she said. "Come up and see it. But what do you mean by very little time? Must you go away quite soon?"

"I'm afraid so. I'm not perfectly sure yet," he replied, following her as she began to ascend the stairs.

She preceded him along the corridor, and up the three steps which led to the Louis Seize boudoir. When they had both entered he closed the door upon them. Then he walked across the room and stood gazing from the window at the brilliant blue sea, the rose-granite rocks, and the fantastic isles beginning to appear larger as the tide fell. An afternoon hush was over everything. The patients had evidently had their orders from the Stricklands, and were gone from the garden, which lay invitingly tranquil. It was not far from being an ideal honeymoon spot.

"Think it's pretty?" he asked nonchalantly.

She hesitated, and then came, with an effort, to his side. "We both know it is a business arrangement, but it might make it easier if we could pretend a little," *was her thought*. Aloud she said: "Of course I admire *it*. Who could help it?" They both stood, engulfed in



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a tremendous silence; and it was then that she became aware—as once before in Gatesgarth Wood she had been aware—of something insurgent in Ranulf, obstinately held under. He was practically motionless, but she was sensible of a quiver, as of some engine, fully charged for motion, but controlled to inaction by the pressure of a powerful lever.

"Well," he said at last, "it's a good thing you like it. Stay as long as you feel inclined, and then go home, or wherever you prefer. I've an idea the war won't last much longer now, and then, you see, you will be able to go where you please."

She felt as though he turned the screw a little tighter. "You speak as if you intended never to come back!" she said resentfully.

"Well, I shan't come back. I told you it would be all right for you, didn't I?"

The direct words were a shock to her, in combination with the careful quietude of his manner. "You do intend to explain yourself, I hope," she stammered. "You wouldn't let me speak—you promised that you would satisfy me after—afterwards! Well, now I demand that you speak out—that you tell me what you mean—what it all means."

He seated himself deliberately upon the window-seat, as if the scene of beauty outside gave him something upon which to fix his attention. "Yes, I'll tell you anything you want to know—now. That was the agreement, as you say."

She drew up a little chair near, and looked at him urgently, insistently. "You said there were four reasons."

He gave a little shrug. "Four? Perhaps. But there are only three that matter. They're not good reasons, you know; I hope you don't expect that; but they're *pretty strong ones*."

"Well—well? Number one, please?"

"Number one, as you will expect, concerns Monkland."

"Concerns Sir John?" The dark colour of shame rushed over her face, and she turned it away.

"Sir John? No, Hector, of course. I wanted to put it out of his power to marry you; and this seemed the most effective way."

The idea was so completely new to her that she gasped. Now indeed the truth was coming—she was to have it full in the face.

"I can hardly believe that you could say such a thing! What concern was it of yours?"

He shot a furtive glance at her, then turned away doggedly. "To answer fully involves a longish story. But I'm afraid you'll have to put up with that. It is your right to know it, but, before we go on, may I take your promise that what I say shall be just between you and me? What I know my wife may know, but this is an extremely private matter, and involves others. I must have your word that you keep it inviolable—that you do not tell anybody at all what you are now going to hear."

She gave the required assurance, with a feeling of solemnity which was almost fear. Ran nodded in a contented way.

"Right. I trust you with that, as with all the rest. Now about Hector. I have known him all my life, and he is an out-and-out rotter. If you don't believe me—and you probably won't—ask anybody you like. His reputation is fairly extensive. But about five years ago he got a real chance to reform. He became engaged to a downright nice girl, who thought the world of him. He was really in love, I believe, but even with that inducement he couldn't keep straight. She was staying *in the house*, in the autumn of 1913; and on the night



of Brough Hill Fair he came home—well—how shall I put it?—in much the same state as your father was when you and I brought him home; only Pennant was stupefied by what he had drunk, and Hector was excited and noisy.”

“Is it fair? Is it necessary—to tell me this?”

“I’ve got to tell you. I’m awfully sorry that I must, but I must. Not so much to clear myself with you, for I haven’t much hope of that. But for your own sake—to prevent you from hankering after that fellow. May I go on?”

She was conscious now of burning curiosity. “You know what really happened that night?—I mean—I have heard about Miss Lang being found dead, and the mystery—do you know the truth?”

“As near as anybody ever will, I expect; and there are only two others who know, besides myself. It seems that it had been agreed between Hector and Alys Lang that she should sit up until his return that night, so that they might have a few words together, after having been parted all day. He says he was so tipsy that he had forgotten all about this arrangement, until he was going along the corridor to bed, when she opened her door and came out. My own belief is that he went and knocked at her door. It is certain that she opened it, but what happened next is not clear, for he cannot—or says he cannot—remember. I think he must have tried to push his way into her room; anyway, she became aware of his condition, and was seized with a regular panic. No doubt she had never faced an intoxicated person in her life. She fled, and he ran after her—he owns that. Seeing that he pursued, she ran faster and faster. Either she did not see the staircase or she plunged down it in a desperate attempt to escape. In any case, she tripped over the long gown she was wearing, and down she went. I

suppose the betting would have been a hundred to one against her being killed by such a fall. Her head just happened to come crash against the banister at such an angle as to break her neck."

"How dreadful—how dreadful! But how do you know all this?"

"I'm coming to that. Hector told me himself. Her fall sobered him more or less. She had been carrying a candle, which of course went out as she fell, and the whole place was plunged into pitch blackness and silence. You know there is a ghost story about that staircase, and Hector had got it pretty badly, and fancied he saw something. So he says. He called to the girl and got no reply, so he fairly turned tail and raced back to his room for a light; and by the time he had got one he had collected his senses a little, and knew that he ought to rouse somebody; or perhaps he funked going back there alone. So he came to me. I got up at once—in fact, I was not actually in bed—and I went with him to see what had happened. Most of the guest-rooms at Mannadale are a good way from the big staircase, and fortunately nobody heard us. As soon as I found that the poor girl was dead, I said we must awaken Sir John. So I went and did so. He came and saw—heard Hector's story, and then set to pacing up and down the hall in the most awful state. I wanted to go for a doctor, though I knew it was of no use: however, I waited as patiently as I could, while Hector tore his hair and the old man prowled; and at last Sir John made up his mind. He assumed all responsibility."

"You mean, he would not have the truth told?"

"Just that. You see, it would all have sounded pretty bad. It would have been a fearful shock to *Cousin Bessie*. Sir John is as proud as he is narrow-minded, and his one idea was not to have such a story



handed round the Dale. I think he foresaw that if we kept quiet a good many people might think that the ghost accounted for the accident all right. The whole point was—would I hold my tongue, or would I not? I was not likely to be called as a witness, for nobody would know that I had been aroused. I thought the matter over, and I came to the conclusion that as the poor girl was dead I could do her no harm by keeping quiet. In fact, the actual facts, had they come out, might quite likely have been twisted to her discredit. So in the end I promised.”

“And did Lady Monkland never know?”

“No. They didn’t tell her anything about it. She knew very well that there was some story behind it all, but she took care not to butt in, for a reason she had. Lionel, her son, was alive then, and he was in the house that night, too. He was very wild and unbalanced, and he had been a bit sweet on Alys, before she became engaged to Hector. I have always guessed that Cousin Bessie thought Lionel might have had some hand in the matter, and decided that the less she said the better, in case of putting her hand into a hornets’ nest.”

“And the butler’s evidence was given in good faith?”

“Certainly. Parish knew nothing, whatever he may have suspected. He had just made his round and gone downstairs before it all happened. He knew, of course, that Lionel and Hector had come home the worse for drink. He probably had his own theory. But he confined himself to facts, and his steady evidence was what saved the situation. And that’s what makes me fairly certain that Hector left his room, knowing Parish to have vanished for the night, with the idea in his bemused brain of keeping his appointment. I don’t think he deserved to get off so lightly; but you *would think*—wouldn’t you—that one such experience



would be enough to steady a man down for good and all?"

"Indeed and indeed I should suppose so!"

"So did I, but it wasn't. I say—beg pardon, but—do you mind if I smoke?"



## CHAPTER XXVI


### AND THE THIRD

JACYNTH started. "Oh, please! I am sorry I forgot to suggest it."

She brought an ash-tray and matches, setting them upon the window-seat beside him. She was deeply interested in what he had just told her. She did not question its truth. Somehow she knew that it was true.

And what then? She contemplated him as he leaned against the frame, lazily blowing his smoke out into the garden. He was indeed giving her a reason why she should not marry Hector Monkland. But did it help at all in the further difficulty as to her having married Ran Warristoun?

"Well, now we come," he continued, "to the state of things when I got home to Estongarth this autumn. Lionel was dead, and there was Hector installed as heir to Mannadale and freely assuming himself to be heir to the Place as well. He was playing the same old game. That is to say, he had determined to marry a girl who was thoroughly good, and who didn't know his record. As I said just now, I had supposed that the death of Alys Lang would have turned him completely round, and made him as steady as old Time. So I kept an eye on him, and I soon found out that it was nothing of the kind. Far from it. His new position was causing him to think he might do as he liked. He put on swank. Then came the day of Brough Hill Fair, and two things happened to make me certain *what I was going to do*. We needn't go into details



about Hector's behaviour. Haynes and I had to bring him home and smuggle him into the house; and we had just done with him when I met you at the bridge." He paused, thoughtfully knocking off his ash against the window-sill. "I wonder if you remember something you said to me that night? Do you remember that you expressed your horror of a man who drank, and I asked you if you would marry a drunkard?"

"Ye-es, I believe I do."

"Well, I wasn't likely to forget what you said, knowing what I knew of Monkland, the man everybody said you were likely to marry. These were your exact words, *Not if he were a king, a millionaire, the last man on earth!* . . . After that, I thought it was up to me to save you."

"To save me!" she echoed, in an odd voice.

He turned scarlet, a thing she had never seen him do before. "The remedy, you would say, is worse than the disease."

"Indeed, indeed, I had no such thought. . . . I—I don't know what I meant. Please go on."

"Well, I did the only thing which it seemed to me that I could do. I went to Hector and told him that he must clear out. I said I was going to prevent his marrying you. I had the hold over him, of knowing the secret history of the Alys Lang episode, and I said you should know it too. We had a hot time, but he was obliged to give in partially. You see, both his aunt and Miss Bellairs knew that he was drinking again, and they were most anxious to get him away. He said he would go to this place, somewhere in Cornwall, where they have a patent cure; but he wouldn't pass me his word to give you up altogether. So we separated. He knew I was going to tell you what I have told you; but I think he was quite sure you *wouldn't* listen to me. I was fairly sure of that, too.




I knew you thought pretty small beer of me. . . . However, this brings us to reason number two."

"Is it as surprising as the last?" she asked, with a nervous smile.

"No, this one's a bit dull. I might spin it out a good way, but I don't want to bother you with any more long stories. You are listening very patiently, and I mustn't take an unfair advantage. This, then, was the position. Unfortunately, not only was Hector in love with you; he was also my heir. I disliked him quite as much in the latter capacity as in the first. It may seem to you mighty curious, but I had a great hunger to have someone belonging to me, somebody who would be my natural legatee, so that nobody can feel surprised at the disposal of my property when my will is read. . . . You are the one creature whom I could picture with satisfaction as living at Eston-garth, and using my old home as your own. . . . I made my will as soon as you accepted me, and it was duly signed after the wedding. There are two copies. Mr. Bentley at Bircastle has one, and Strickland here has the other. . . . I have left you everything, in trust, for your life. If, after my death, you marry some other man, as is most likely, then your son, if you have one, inherits absolutely. If you remain a widow, or die childless, then the estates must be sold, and the proceeds applied to a purpose which I have named. There is only one condition attached to the whole thing. It is that you don't marry Hector Monkland."

She made a slight sound of resentment, and he turned his eyes upon her, almost for the first time. They were full of reproach. "*Not if he were the last man on earth,*" he quoted.

"*That's what I mean. After what you have told me, was there any need to add such a condition?*"



"Perhaps not," he replied, after a moment's reflection. "And yet, I don't know. Hector is a plausible beast, and you were inclined to like him. He's handsome too. If he saw a chance to get, not merely you, but the property with you, he would move heaven and earth to do it. I wanted to protect you as much as, being dead, I possibly could."

"I—I ought to thank you. You have certainly gone to a great deal of trouble on my account," she faltered. "But why did you do it as you have done—why go to work in such a topsy-turvy fashion? Beginning at the wrong end? Why must it all be done in a minute?"

"Ah," said Ran, "that brings us to number three reason, which has nothing to do with the other two. Unfortunately, the haste was unavoidable. In other words, if I wanted to get married at all, I had to do it so suddenly that nobody knew of my intention until too late to prevent it. Please don't think I am out of my mind, it really is so. I needn't bother you with details, but I beg you to believe the facts are as I say. My father was warned, years and years ago, that neither of his sons would be allowed to marry. Guy, as you know, was killed very soon after he became engaged. I thought that I had better remain single than go about always in fear of being shot from behind a tree. At that time I didn't much care whether I lived or died. For the past four years I have been doing all I knew to stop a bullet. But, as they say always happens, you never find the thing you are looking for. When I got home, and they told me they were going to invalid me out of the army, I began to think things over. There was Hector, the only person to succeed me, and I hated the very thought. I suddenly made up my mind that, if I could, I ought to marry; and I set inquiries on foot, to find out



whether by any happy chance the last representative of my enemy's family had gone West during the war. I have only a very indirect and vague channel of information about him, but I gather that he is still alive and still on the war-path . . . and so then, you see, my great scheme came darting into my head. You've heard of a death-bed marriage?"

"Ah, don't talk like this——"

"Yes, but ours is a death-bed marriage, as I want you to understand clearly. I have married you in order to put you into possession of all I have. I have undertaken a job in which there is perhaps one chance in a hundred of my coming through; because I'd rather die for my country than by the hand of an assassin. You must wait here, if you will be so good, until you have definite news of my being out of the way; and then you have your life before you, and money enough to do anything you want to do, yet safe from Monkland."

He laid down the end of his cigarette, extinguishing it with care. She neither moved nor spoke.

"Is that satisfactory?" he asked hesitatingly, as though a little surprised at the way in which she took it.

She felt a desire to laugh and cry at the same moment. Anger, pity, amazement were so mingled in her heart, that when she spoke she knew not which was most likely to come uppermost. The fact that she was expected to offer comment upon the ghastly-comic situation made her head reel.

"*Satisfactory!* What a word! What mad, wild ideas! I—you . . . Oh, what have I done, what have I let you do? . . . You tell me that you have married me to pour into my lap all you possess, and that you expect to be murdered, almost at once? Well, you *knew—you must have known—that I could not accept*

such a . . . Oh, isn't it all *hopeless*? . . . What can I say? Why didn't you explain—tell me before?"

He looked somewhat shaken by her vehemence, but he smiled at her question.

"What use would it have been for me to tell you? What was there to tell? You liked Hector and you didn't like me. If I had come to you with tales against him you would have liked him better and hated me worse. You know you would."

She dashed away the thickly-dropping tears with a handkerchief. "I don't believe a word of this preposterous story about your going in fear of your life! How can it be true?"

"Well, it is, that's all I can tell you. They had more than one try at my father, and they got Guy all right. So there's something in it."

"But if you know that much, why can't you take steps to have it stopped?"

"Well, because I'm rather vague about the whole thing. I mean, I am not certain where the man is, nor under what name he goes. I went to Tréguier to try and find out. There is a disreputable old lawyer there who collects information for him respecting my movements. But although we know he sends on his news, we can't find out to whom it goes."

"Why can't you find out?"

He answered after a pause: "If I wanted to enough, perhaps I could."

She sprang to her feet, clasping her hands tightly together, holding her nether lip with her teeth to keep it from quivering.

"Ranulf, this is dreadful. I mean—it's so unkind—so—so preposterous! How can you suppose I feel when you sit there calmly talking about going to your *death* like this? Assuming that I don't—care?"

"Well, you don't want me to assume the other



thing, do you? Unless I had implied that you wouldn't be called upon to pass the rest of your life with me, you wouldn't have consented, would you?"

His face was troubled. Evidently her agitation distressed him. He rose, moved slowly and uncertainly towards the door, as though contemplating leaving the room.

She cried out: "Don't go! You can't go like this! We have to thresh this matter out! You have given me only three reasons, so far. I want the last."

He halted, but did not turn round. "The last one's not important," said he with his back to her. "I haven't time for it now. I'll write it down and if I don't come back in a week from now, Strickland shall hand you the letter."

She made a sound of rage, fairly stamping her foot. "You expect me to sit down quietly here for a week expecting every day to hear that you have been murdered?"


"Why not?"

"Because . . . because . . ." She went up to him, grasped his arm energetically, pulled him round. "Sit down!" indicating imperiously his late seat. "You cannot go yet. You have not told me the half that I have a right to know. I am your wife! If anybody is out to kill you, it is my right to know who, and why! What is the meaning of such mediæval nonsense?"

He did not sit down, but stood staring from the window, hands in his pockets.

"It's simply their way of paying back a wrong. My father committed the wrong. His sons are to pay the penalty. It does sound like mediæval nonsense, doesn't it? Do you remember that tale of Prosper Mérimée's, where the young man goes home to Corsica, and finds himself in the midst of a vendetta? I know just how *he felt*, that the whole thing was simply silly. That





was the reason why I said nothing of it at the inquest on Guy. That was the biggest mistake I ever made. I suppose, if they had decided to try me for the crime, I should have told them what I knew; and in all probability that would have resulted in an arrest, and I needn't have gone about ever since like a dog with a tin can tied to his tail. I have often thought what a fool I was."

"That you were! Simply crazy! Fancy keeping a thing like that to yourself! But now you have a wife, and it is due to me to understand your affairs. Who then, is it, who bears you the grudge?"

"The Comte de Kerlistec," he replied.

She started. "The Comte de—what, *her* husband?"

She pointed to the portrait, and her question brought Ranulf round with a start.

He stood staring. "Why—why, where did that come from?" he asked.

She repeated what Walter had told her of the arrival of the picture.

He came nearer and gazed, absorbed. "That's the woman. She ran off with my father. My mother had, I understand, forgiven a great deal. But after that she never saw my father again. I think it hastened her death. She never went back to the Place afterwards, but brought me up here for the most part. Guy was a good bit older, and was more with my father. Mother didn't live many years. I fancy that Madame de Kerlistec is dead too, now. Her husband was thirty years older than she: he died many years back. It is her son who keeps up the vendetta."

He turned away with a hopeless kind of laugh. "You see, he had the portrait sent here—just to let me know that he is not forgetting!"

Jass felt as if she were choking.

"Now, Ranulf, you must be sensible," she said



breathlessly. "You must give orders, set things in train; this must be a madman, and he must be caught—do you hear?—caught and rendered powerless! How will you set about it?"

He smiled down at her eagerness, but there was anguish in his eyes.

"What use, Jass?" said he. "He won't matter when I'm gone; and I'm going very soon. The only thing I'm worrying about is as to whether you feel you can forgive me for what I've done——" He broke off in a hurry, for Jass gave vent to a wail of mingled remorse and exasperation. Words seemed so entirely inadequate to the situation, she felt so outraged by his attitude of calm acceptance of the inevitable, that she could not in the least express herself.

"How can you talk so? How can you?" she said, flinging herself into an easy chair and covering her face.

"I don't quite know what you mean," he faltered. "I thought that perhaps when I'd made a clean breast of it, you'd see what I was driving at all along. At least"—his voice was pleading—"you can see that I meant well. I know it was a wild kind of idea, but I—I hardly see why you should resent it so deeply."

"Resent it? Resent it?" she began . . . but she had been through too much, and she broke down completely. The tears and sobs came in a regular tempest, and her one desire was that Ran should leave her alone until she could be calm.

"Go," she stammered, through her storm of feeling, "please go away a little while! Give me time! Just an hour—oh, do go away—I really can't bear it!"

Ran gave a kind of shiver, and his face set hard.

"*Perhaps it's better so,*" he said, so low that she never heard. He leaned over her hidden face. "I'll

take myself off—it's all right. Try not to be so unhappy. God bless you," he muttered.

Then he ceased speaking so suddenly that for a minute or two she sobbed on, thinking to hear him once more urge her to be comforted. But the silence lengthened, and presently, lifting her head, she saw that he had left the room.

She drew a long, deep breath of relief. She had a breathing space, a pause in which she could perhaps bring her mind to face this entirely new view of things, with the consequences entailed.

Since he was so humble, and asked for so little, she could meet him without the dread which had overshadowed her; and in the short time that they were to spend together they might grow to know each other. . . . Was it not her sacred duty to see that the last few days he had should be as happy as she could make them?

## CHAPTER XXVII

### ON THE TRACK

THE one aim of the Stricklands that afternoon was to efface themselves, so as to leave a clear field for the young couple. Tea was laid in the sunk garden, and a note, left on the hall table, informed Ranulf that the boat was ready, if he liked to take his wife on the water afterwards.

Agatha went off down to the laundry, which was situated in a cottage at the end of a field on the estate. There was a very heavy wash, the result of the arrival of the newly-stalled convoy, and La Dame Bleue proceeded to give a hand with the ironing.

She looked up from her work about six o'clock, to see the bride enter the ironing room, looking about her with every sign of agitation and distress.

"Why, my dear, what is it?" she cried, leaving the table and coming forward; and Jass broke into quick, stammering words:

"At last! At last I have found you! Oh, where is your brother? Is Mr. Warristoun with him? I—can't believe—but I cannot find him anywhere! He wouldn't go away and leave me like this, would he? That would be too impossibly horrible!"

Miss Strickland felt quite staggered. She put her arm about the quivering shoulders and led the distracted girl out into the meadow which stretched about the *blancherisserie*.

"Now, tell me what has happened," said she gently.

"Why, just that he has disappeared—Ranulf has

disappeared," panted Jass. "We had been having a talk—very, very painful—about his going away, you know. I broke down hopelessly at last, and I was so ashamed, I asked him to leave me alone for a bit, until I could pull myself together. When I felt better I went and bathed my eyes, and then the maid came, and said our *gôûter* was ready in the garden, so I went to tell him, and he—he wasn't in the house. I ran to the sunk garden, thinking he was waiting for me there, but no! So I began to look everywhere, but I can't find him."

"Dear child, I am quite sure he must be somewhere with Walter—you have not seen Walter?"

"No . . . no. . . ."

"Then we may be fairly sure they have gone off together, perhaps for a bathe, perhaps in the boat. . . ."

"Without telling me?" quavered Jass incredulously.

"Well, Ran might have thought you wanted to be quiet——"

"I can't believe it! You don't know how dreadful it all is—I don't expect you have ever heard about his going in danger of his life all this time! Did you know he has a secret enemy, who will kill him at the very first chance, now that he is married? Oh, Miss Strickland, if it has been done already! . . . I feel that I shall go out of my mind."

Although persuaded that this was absurd, Agatha did not pooh-pooh it. Jacynth was evidently strung up to a dangerous pitch, and she felt vexed with Ranulf, because her suspicion was that he had gone off secretly to save himself the anguish of bidding his wife farewell. But so sudden and early a departure was wholly unlooked-for. He had spoken of being at Kerlistec some days.

*She conducted Jass back to the house, found Mau-*



rette and left her in charge while she hastened in search of Walter. She met him coming from the cottage, with a countenance expressive of perturbation. He had but just returned from a visit to an old curé who was a friend of his, in a village about two miles distant. In reply to Agatha's eager: "Have you seen Ran?" he replied rather crossly:

"Ran's an idiot. I went into my study to fetch my tobacco, and on my writing-table I find this—with a sealed envelope." He showed her a slip of paper, with the following message scrawled upon it—

"I'm off. Jacynth doesn't know I have started. It was the only thing to do. I simply felt I couldn't say good-bye to her. You have all my instructions, and will do the best you can for her, won't you?—you and Agatha. I trust her to you. I want you to hand her the enclosed, this day week. Adieu.

"RAN."

Agatha read this in a kind of stupefaction. "You mean to tell me he has really gone and left her, without a word of farewell?" she said. "Well, he is—he really is——"

"Silly fool! Sparing his own feelings at the expense of hers," replied Walter, with deep vexation. "He is so much in love, he hardly knows what he is doing, and I think his one fear was that he might turn coward and be unable to tear himself away from her."

"You don't think," suggested Agatha reflectively, "that he is the least bit unhinged by it all? He has been telling her some horrible tale of his having an enemy who is determined to kill him——"

"*What?*" shouted Walter, so suddenly that she started. "Good heaven, then there is something in it after all! . . ."

"Something in what? You knew he was going on a very dangerous expedition?"

"Yes. I couldn't account for it. I mean, it seemed to me so strange that he should have volunteered—now of all times. But if what you say is true, if he really does go in danger from the same hand that struck down Guy——"

"Mercy on us, Walter, are you speaking seriously?"

"Very seriously, I assure you. I was given a hint of it, long ago, although I never told you. There were particular reasons why I never told you."

He broke off and flushed awkwardly. Agatha, in spite of the summers she had spent at Kerlistec, had never heard of the scandal of the elopement of the Comtesse with her husband's friend. It had happened in Paris, and the excitement of it had died away before the Stricklands came to pass so much time in Brittany.

Walter knew. He knew something else, something he had always most jealously guarded from his sister: namely, that, after Mrs. Warristoun's death, Ranulf's father would have made to the woman he had ruined the tardy reparation of marriage, had it not been for the fatal fact that he had meanwhile fallen in love with Agatha Strickland. For years he had hoped that she might relent and consent to marry him, and as long as he had that hope he would do nothing to make it impossible. Madame de Kerlistec died in her disgrace, indirectly by Agatha's fault.

He now told her the main facts—that the portrait in the château was the portrait of the lady who had been Warristoun's mistress, and that a vendetta upon the Warristouns had been declared by the vindictive old comte and handed on to his son for completion.

"I am persuaded," said he, "that Ranulf has married this girl, simply in order that with all his worldly



goods he might endow her, knowing full well that his chances of life with her are very small. When he was here the other night, and gave me the copy of his will and told me most minutely what I was to do when he was gone, I remonstrated with him upon being such a fatalist, and speaking as if he could not possibly come through. He said nothing explicit, but he let me see that he was perfectly convinced that he could not survive."

"Oh, how like a man, to marry her and leave her to break her heart!" cried Agatha unjustly.

"Well, if a man loves a woman, and knows he can't live long, it is something to be able to leave her so magnificently provided for as is the case here. That's one view of it. Where is the poor child? Let us hear what she has to say."

Jacynth was still in a state of violent agitation, but Walter's news calmed her a little. That Ranulf had gone down to the cottage, and written a message, showed that his departure was deliberate. Moreover, he had taken with him the things which had been prepared for his journey.

Walter suggested a further consolatory notion. Ranulf's unlooked-for departure might throw any possible pursuer off the track. He had come to Kerlistec for a stay of some days. If his disappearance could be kept a secret, time might be gained for the searching inquiry which Jacynth was determined to set on foot. Nobody knew that he had left the place, though some might have seen him leave the house. It would not be difficult to keep up the fiction of his being still there for, say, twenty-four hours, possibly longer.

"Somehow," objected Agatha, "it sounds so *insane* to suppose that some skulking murderer is hanging about."



And at her words, Jacynth, who had been sitting in an attitude of mute despair, suddenly jumped.

"Why," said she, "perhaps I saw him! Mr. Strickland—you remember the man—the fisherman whom I spoke to yesterday? You said he must be a stranger."

Walter shook his head. "Afraid he is not a suspicious character," he replied. "I mentioned him to old Christophe this morning, and he told me who the man is—a sailor from Paimpol, discharged from the navy, and come here to see if he could find work."

"Be that as it may," persisted Jass, "I knew I had seen him somewhere before—not only because there was something I remembered in his face, but also because, when first I looked at him, there was a tell-tale expression in his eyes, as if he feared I might recognise him. Now, unless I am making a ridiculous mistake, I have recalled the place where I saw him before. It was in England—in Estondale—driving a car. I have an idea he is a chauffeur——"

"Chauffeur?" Agatha caught at the word. "Why, Walter, Miss Bellairs had a French chauffeur—surely—the man that proved the alibi—the man who walked behind Ran all the way from Bircastle to Gatesgarth."

Jacynth sprang to her feet. "Miss Bellairs has got a car at Mannadale," she cried. "And yes! Now I remember! Somebody said, just before I left, that she had just got back her old chauffeur, discharged from the army! This must be the same man!"

"If it is," cut in Walter, "I shall know him, fast enough. I was at the inquest, you must remember."

"He hid yesterday, when he saw you coming," cried Jacynth; "but this is all very confusing. If he walked behind Ran that day, he cannot be the man who was *in the wood* and did the murder, can he?"

Walter was thinking closely, and he gave a big



sigh of disappointment. "I fear this theory will lead us nowhere," he said. "If we start with the idea of a vendetta—of someone whose object it was to exterminate the Warristouns—then that person's purpose would be excellently served if one brother were hanged for the murder of the other. The idea that the assassin of the first should come forward to clear the second, is ridiculous."

"It sounds so," admitted Jacynth, "but then, what is Miss Bellairs' chauffeur doing here in Brittany, disguised as a fisherman?"

"If you are right in thinking that you recognise the man, that is a most curious point. The question is—are you sure?"

Jacynth looked irresolute. "I can hardly say. I never had any reason to take notice of the chauffeur. But my memory seems to connect him with Estongarth village. I was standing in the road—the car came along. It did not stop. . . . Tell me what the real man was like—the one who gave evidence at the inquest?"

"Under-sized—with a rather delicate face—not at all handsome, but with unusual eyes."

"That is quite a good description of the man on the beach yesterday."

"Then," said Walter, "it is essential that I should get a sight of him."

"If he is tracking Ranulf he will have gone by now."

"I think not. He will not be prepared for Ranulf's leaving so soon. He may know that Ranulf is on secret service."

"If he really is the chauffeur, he would very likely know, because I am sure that Ranulf told Miss Bellairs. By the way, he must have come over on the ship that brought us, must he not?"

"My word, yes! Well, either he tried for his chance

during the passage and failed to get it—or he felt there would be a poetic justice in completing the business here in Kerlistec; or he thought that a seaside honeymoon, with bathing and boating, would give him a much safer chance to do it and get away; or else we are all mistaken and the whole thing is a mare's nest."

"But," put in Agatha, "let us suppose that it is not a mare's nest, but a true theory, and that this man, who has posed as a chauffeur, is really the last Comte de Kerlistec: then, having been born here, and having spent the first years of his lonely little life here—he was put out to nurse in the village, you know—he is familiar with every cave and cranny of this coast, and he speaks Breton like a native."

"This man spoke Breton——"

"I wonder," mused Walter, "whether he is likely to have tampered with the boat. If we found that it had been touched, that would be strong confirmation of our idea."

"Oh," said Jacynth earnestly, "don't let us wait for chances like that. Can't we somehow get hold of the man for you to identify?"

"Why, of course we can," was the instant reply. "The surveillance on this coast is very strict. I have only to go up to the coastguard station and say I have reason to suspect him."

"I wonder they haven't detained him as it is," went on his sister. "Christophe is sure to have reported his presence. I think they rely too much upon Christophe."

"In any case I'll go up there immediately," said Walter. "I'm determined to get to the bottom of this. If they arrest him and send for me to come and have a look at him, Ranulf will be safe for a time at least;



and if he is the man we think him to be, there will be good reason to detain him."

"Oh, thank God!" murmured Jass with a sob of relief, "we shall at least be doing something! I can't sit quiet and think about it. Is there anything else we can do?"

"You might send a line to England and ask if Miss Bellairs' chauffeur is away," suggested Walter. "Ask them to telegraph a reply, one word, yes or no. Word your letter so that the censor may let it through—as though the thing were a joke."

Jacynth had a letter to her father, as bright and reassuring as she could make it, all ready for post. She added the inquiry suggested by Walter, who took it to post on his way up to the coastguard station.

Nothing then remained to be done but to exist through the empty hours in hope of news.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE ALIBI

STRICKLAND was a staunch friend of the Kerlistec coastguards; or *gabelous*, as the natives persisted in calling them.

At the beginning of the war he had been of great use to them in helping to clear the village of various *baigneurs* or summer visitors, who spoke French with a curious accent and seemed to have the money to make a very long stay.

Thus they lent an attentive ear to what he had to say, although they were sure that he was upon a wrong scent. The man to whom he alluded had called upon them of his own free will. His name was Bastien, and his papers of discharge from the navy were upon him, and quite in order. He had come from the Mediterranean, and had given details of an engagement with an Austrian man-o'-war, and of his homeward journey.

Nevertheless, they promised that he should be brought to the station for interrogation by Mr. Strickland, since the ruses of the enemies of France round and about her coast were endless.

Thus, any minute might bring word that he had been taken.

The thought was uppermost in Jacynth's mind when she opened her heavy eyes late next morning, after an almost sleepless night.

Maurette brought in her coffee and rolls, with a pile of letters upon the tray. These were mostly forwarded, belated congratulations upon her marriage.



One was from her father. Another thick letter, also with the Estongarth postmark, was in a handwriting which gave her a shock. She had not often seen it, but she knew it—Hector Monkland's untidy script.

She left that to the last. She read all the others, and still the envelope faced her, like a heavy task which must be accomplished.

She wondered considerably what he could have to say. He could not fairly upbraid. He had been upon the brink of a proposal, had turned his back upon her, and quitted the Dale without so much as bidding her good-bye. True, she knew now that this line of conduct had been practically forced upon him by Ranulf. But he must have guessed how it would appear, to her.

Yet that he should desire to reproach her seemed the only excuse he could have for writing her such a long letter. . . .

She ate mechanically the delicious toast substituted by Maurette for *petits pains*, in deference to English taste. Her mind was concentrated so wholly upon Ranulf and how to preserve his life until they could meet again, that she could not bring herself to embark upon what she foresaw would be the disagreeable task of reading what Hector had written.

When at last she broke the seal, she found within two envelopes, marked 1 and 2. Number 1 was inscribed, "To be read first."

This curious arrangement was enough in itself to fix her attention; and, as she began to read, the urgency of what was written soon blotted every other thought from her mind.

Hector began by owning that he had no business to write at all. Only the desperate nature of the situation, as he saw it, induced him to take such a course. He had *forfeited* all right to address her, flung away

his chances, exchanged hopes of pure happiness for the dust and ashes of repentance and futile regret. He compared himself with Othello—

“One whose hand  
Like the base Indian’s, flung a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe!”

“I thought I knew my cousin Ranulf pretty well,” he went on, “but, as it turns out, I have been like a child in his hands. When he came to me, so short a time ago, to blackmail me—in other words, to threaten me that unless I cleared out and left you he would slander me to you—I was at a great disadvantage. My conscience was not clear. I knew I had behaved disgracefully, and I honestly agreed with him that it would be better for me not to go to you to tell you of my feeling for you until I was in a better state of health, and could assure you that I had actually renounced all bad habits for the future. Curious though it may seem, I did not perceive that my leaving like that would or could cast any slur upon you. I suppose one is always rather like an ostrich when in love—one does not realise that one’s secret is public property, before it has been revealed to the person who is to share it.

“My one anxiety was that you should not be told the real reason why I had to go. Ranulf promised that willingly enough, and of course I see now how glad he was to give such a promise. He left you to imagine that I had defaulted, that I was letting you down, humiliating you in the sight of all Estongarth.

“I went off like a beaten dog. Hardly was I installed in the place to which I had betaken myself, when I heard the staggering news that you and he were engaged. I simply could not believe it at first. The whole thing was so contrary to all I had ever



known of you. By what arts he could have brought about such a state of things, I was at a loss to conceive; but I felt I must make some effort to stop the proceedings. I took French leave, and dashed back to Mannadale as fast as the wretched curtailed train service of the war would allow. It landed me there just about an hour after you and he had set out for France. Had I been a couple of hours earlier, I swear I would have made my protest at the altar steps! But more—had I then known what I know now, I should have telegraphed to the vicar, to my uncle, to your father, at all costs to delay the ceremony just long enough to hear the 'just cause and impediment' which I could lay before them.

"But I was too late! . . .

"I went up to the Grange, and there, in the course of a long talk, Adela told me what she ought, had she had any heart, or any sense of duty, to have revealed when first she noticed—as she appears to have done at once—that Ranulf was attracted by you. Her story fairly bowled me over, but when I could pull myself together, I went to your father and laid the whole case before him. He was terribly shaken, but implored me to hold my tongue. I should have obeyed implicitly had it not been for one thing which he told me. He said that the reason why this marriage was arranged in such indecent haste was that Warristoun was going on secret service; that he wished to make you mistress of his possessions before leaving you, and that he was taking you to France to leave you at his outlandish French château, in complete isolation (as he thinks) from your own friends.

"When I heard this, I determined to take a desperate chance. If, when this letter reaches you, he is still with you, then burn the enclosure number two, unread. What is done is done. Put the past behind



you. But if Providence has been merciful, and he has gone away and left you his wife in name only, read on to the end. And all I can add is, that a cable of just one word—'Come'—will bring friends to your aid."

A few more bitter self-reproaches concluded the letter.

Jacynth took up the second envelope. She had the impulse to tear it in shreds. All her heart was one hot flame of wrath that Hector should dare to write so to her. Then she determined to read it. Some slander of Adela's! It was better, far better, that she should know it! . . . Adela's revenge, of course. She wondered if Miss Bellairs had perhaps dictated the letter she had just read. At least, the present position satisfied the conditions laid upon her. She was alone; and she was determined to know all there was to know. In her heart, as she broke the seal, was a half-formed prayer that the letter might contain something to help her. And thus she read:

"I should be feeling even more guilty than I do at this minute, if I didn't remember that I warned you, with the utmost clearness, of Ranulf's character, in the early days of his appearance on the scene. I have a vivid memory of our discussing the question of Guy Warristoun's murder, and I know that I told you that I had reason to believe that the alibi given at the inquest was not genuine, but concocted. I felt sure from the first that Adela Bellairs knew more about it than appeared. *She has now confessed as much to me.*

"I am not sure how much you know of the state of things at the time of the murder. In case you have not been told, I will explain that in the summer of 1913 Ranulf fell violently in love with Adela, and became engaged to her. Her people were at the time




very poor, and old Warristoun disliked the engagement, cut up rough, refused to do anything for Ranulf, with whom he was always at cross-purposes. Soon after the engagement, Guy came home, saw Adela for the first time, and fell in love as suddenly as his brother had done. Adela tells me that she always preferred Ranulf, however unlikely that seems. But her mother was with her at Mannadale, and she was an old lady with an eye to the main chance. She was determined her girl should marry the heir, more especially as she guessed what a blow such an engagement would be to old Warristoun. So she arranged the transfer. But it's a serious thing to come between a Warristoun and the thing his desires are set upon. Ranulf was a dangerous man to jilt. Guy and he had never got on well. What Guy had now done was a thing past all forgiveness to a nature like his brother's.

"Such was the situation when they went shooting together in Gatesgarth Wood; and, knowing the two men, it is easy enough to picture the sudden, violent quarrel, with its unforeseen, fatal result.

"The deed once done, nobody would repent more utterly than poor old Ran. His only chance lay in an alibi, and of course Joyce was easy enough to square. You know how amply Ranulf rewarded him afterwards.

"Adela, however, saw that the evidence of this man, known for his devotion to the younger Warristoun, might be regarded with some suspicion by the coroner. She had been suffering, she tells me, the most awful tortures, ever since her breaking with Ran; and she was quite determined that, he being now the heir, she would marry him in spite of all. I think she supposed that he had killed Guy—not as a premeditated murder, but in a raging fight. She was tremendously anxious that *he should not be brought to trial*. I can fancy what



her sufferings were. They—the Bellairs—were, as I have said, very hard up; but, as they lived in an inaccessible part of the country, they drove a car—a wretched little tin kettle it was—and they employed a chauffeur, a Frenchman, rejoicing in the high-sounding name of d'Aubigny. They made their journey to Mannadale in the car, which remained there during their stay.

“Adela tells me that this Frenchman, early in his service, developed a passionate devotion to herself: one of those unspoken tragedies, of which there are, I daresay, more knocking about than we suppose. He was always very careful, and never presumed, but somehow she got in the habit of confiding her troubles to him, when they were quite alone, which was not very often.

“Between the inquest and the remand she worked herself up into a pitiable state; and one day during that time her chauffeur volunteered that he believed he saw a way in which he could make the evidence for the alibi quite conclusive. In her distracted state she clutched at any chance. She tells me she never so much as considered what the result might be, should the perjury be detected.

“It appears that d'Aubigny was in the habit, when he wished to run into Bircastle upon his own or his mistress's errands, of borrowing a motor-cycle belonging to one of the stable men at the Grange. He always left this machine in a shed just inside a field, before he came to the town, so as not to be encumbered with it in the hilly streets and market-place. He had, truly enough, been into Bircastle that day, and any townsman would have said that he was on foot. He had, however, as usual, travelled on the motor-cycle, whose owner, as luck would have it, was away on a three days' holiday, and was not aware that his machine had been



borrowed. As you may have been told, it was market-day in Bircastle, and all the men were in the town, so that nobody saw d'Aubigny, either when he put his machine into the shed, or when he took it again a couple of hours later. He left the town about the time he says he did, but travelling fast, he could not have seen Ranulf, being considerably before him upon the road, and not behind him at all. By a lucky chance his story was completely successful; and, as you know, *I never believed it.*

"Ranulf was acquitted, and Adela seems to have had no doubt that he would return to her, though she expected that it might be some time before he felt able to forgive her. For several months she remained fairly confident. Then old Warristoun passed out, and Ranulf was left his own master. Instead of coming to her, he went off to France without a word. I think then she knew in her heart that she would never be pardoned. D'Aubigny, when he saw her slighted, was furious. Not that he said much; but it appears that one day he dropped hints that he would be able to hang Warristoun if he tried.

"Then the war broke out and seemed to change everything. Adela went to France—always hoping that Ran would turn up somewhere. When he came to the surface here in the Dale, it seems certain that her hopes renewed themselves. But meanwhile—he had seen you!

"Why did Adela not tell me all this a little sooner? When the brute came blackmailing me, I could have retorted upon him by threatening to have the inquiry reopened. He could slander me to you. I, on the other hand, could have sent him to take his trial for murder.

"All this that I have written is fact. If you read it, and if the chance still remains to you, won't you

reconsider the whole position, before you decide to remain with a man who took advantage of your momentary pique against me to entrap you for life, and who is, to the best of my judgment, almost certainly—his brother's murderer?"

White to the lips, Mrs. Ranulf Warristoun leaned back against her pillows.

She thought of her father's simile of the stick being swept over the cataract. Nothing could have been farther from the thoughts of Hector and Adela, those two ancient enemies, when they put their heads together to concoct that letter, than the fact that they were supplying to its reader just the very clue she sought.

It leapt out upon her with blinding clearness. d'Aubigny was the murderer. He had ridden home through the wood—it was not allowed, but it was sometimes done. He had seen Guy Warristoun alone, seated by the tree. The roaring of the waterfall had drowned alike the sound of his engines, and of his stealthy approach.

And if Ranulf had dropped the least hint of his own theory of the crime, the doings of the French chauffeur would have been instantly submitted to examination. It seemed odd to her that Ranulf himself should have had no suspicion of the man. But Ranulf, she knew, was not a suspicious person. (She learned later that Ranulf's first knowledge of the existence of d'Aubigny was when that individual stepped forward to give evidence on his behalf—a circumstance which naturally inclined Ranulf to look upon him with favour, although he was doubtful of the truth of d'Aubigny's evidence.)

*The difficulty which had confronted them the night before—namely that, if the chauffeur were the mur-*



derer, he would not be likely to come forward to save Ranulf, was now solved. His love for his beautiful mistress had deflected him from the path of vengeance. In order to achieve her happiness he had perjured himself, permitting the second victim whose destruction he had planned, to live, because his love of a woman was greater than his hatred of a man.

Now, however, the interrupted vendetta was to be completed; for his sacrifice had been in vain. He had not accomplished its sole object—the happiness of Adela Bellairs. The hated Warristoun had actually married another woman. Added to the original motive for his destruction must now be reckoned the venom with which the chauffeur regarded the man who had contemptuously spurned the heart of his beloved mistress.

Unless they could lay him by the heels and render his venom innocuous, the matter would be a mere question of time and opportunity.

Having formulated which goading thought, Jacynth leapt forthwith out of bed, and rang for Maurette, her hands trembling with haste and excitement.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### JACYNTH TAKES A HAND

STRICKLAND was reading the paper out upon the terrace when the bride came forth with a rush from the open hall door and ran to him. He was horrified at the sight of her white cheeks and the dark marks under her eyes.

"Come, come, you are not keeping your courage," he said reproachfully.

"Oh, I hardly know what I am doing," was her answer. "I have heard such news—it has come in such a roundabout way. I am quite sure that I know all the truth about Guy's murder, and, if I am right, then the man I saw on the shore did murder him, and means more than ever to murder Ranulf. I must tell you all about it, but first of all tell me: have they taken him—the man who calls himself Bastien?"

"No," replied Walter reluctantly, "he seems to have disappeared."

The colour fled from her very lips. "There! What did I tell you? He has followed Ran! . . . And we are helpless! We cannot send any kind of warning."

"No, no, not as bad as that. Christophe and the coastguards agree in believing that the man cannot have left the place. The warning has been sent all round for miles. He is thought to be in hiding. They are now making a more thorough search, and we may have news at any moment. Sit down—you are shaking from head to foot."

"We had better come to the sunk garden," she said,



gripping his arm for support. "I have so much to tell you—the evidence is actually in my hands—and in such extraordinary fashion. The person who writes to me is quite persuaded that poor Ran did kill Guy—in a passion—and to support his theory he tells me that the chauffeur's evidence was concocted, and that he—the chauffeur—came back that way before Ran came along, not behind him. There would have been plenty of time for him to commit the deed. It all fits in—it hangs together.

"I must tell you the whole story."

"Is it possible?" said Strickland, standing astounded. Then he eagerly went on:

"Let me fetch Agatha. She ought to hear too. Go to the sunk garden and I will find her and bring her along."

Jacynth, before coming downstairs, had re-read Hector's indictment, and underlined such portions as she could read aloud, scoring out those which had to do with the relations between himself, herself, and Ranulf.

"Some of this letter is very private," she explained. "Ranulf is the only person to whom I could show it all."

They listened as attentively as she could wish.

"So it is true," said Agatha at last, "the beautiful Adela really was in love with Ranulf."

"And you say that she is now at Mannadale?" questioned Walter.

"She has been staying there some little time."

"So that Ran could have renewed his suit if he had chosen?"

"Everyone thought he would. I thought so myself."

Agatha smiled her grave, wise smile. "His taste has improved since 1913."

*Jacynth sprang to her feet with a cry. "To think*



that if he had—if he had married her he would be safe now! His marriage with me was the signing of his own death-warrant! Oh, how could he? How could I let him?" She wandered restlessly up and down. "If this suspense is to continue, I shall go mad! Hopelessly, helplessly mad!" cried she. "Can't we do *anything*? For pity's sake suggest something!"

Agatha looked apprehensively at her brother. The girl was so overwrought that she was conscious of fear; but indeed it was not wonderful. Was there ever such a quixotic, blind old blunderer as Ran?

Walter saw the only way to soothe the nerve crisis which seemed imminent.

"Let us get busy this very minute," said he promptly. "I'll ring up the police at Tréguier, and tell them there is a man at large upon this coast whom we have good reason to believe is 'wanted' in case of murder. I'll suggest they send somebody here, shall I?"

This checked her at once. "Yes, yes, that's a very good idea." She followed him into the house, and waited quite patiently during the delay which then ensued.

At last the connection was obtained, and Walter did succeed in explaining the main fact—namely, that a man was haunting the coast at Kerlistec whom they believed to be the last Comte de Kerlistec, and to have designs upon the life of Mr. Warristoun.

To his disappointment, however, the authorities saw no reason to send anybody to the spot. They pointed out that, as the threatened man had left the place, all they had to do was to arrest the would-be homicide. They added that the coastguard body was efficient and would undoubtedly be equal to this. Meanwhile, they undertook to pass on, to the department which was acquainted with Mr. Warristoun's present destination, the warning that he was being tracked by



a private foe, a madman who might interfere with their carefully prepared designs.

On the whole, this was reassuring to Jacynth, who then fixed her mind upon the idea of going down to the coast. She thought that d'Aubigny, if d'Aubigny it were, might perhaps show himself if she went thither alone; and she had some wild notion of appealing to his warped brain by an adroit suggestion that, if he needed a life, it would do almost as well to kill her as her husband.

Walter unkindly vetoed this suggestion. "A nice thing for us, when Ran turns up, and wants to know what has become of you! But I tell you what we will do. You and I will go to the shore together, after *déjeuner*, and have a row in the boat. Wouldn't you like that? There are one or two caves out on the isles where we might look for our man."

The suggestion pleased and calmed her. She grew more normal, and actually apologised to Agatha for having given way.

"I'm usually a quiet creature," she said, "but this is to me so horrible, so much more horrible than war. I have seen all kinds of dreadful things—you know, I was in one of the hospitals they bombed—but nothing then appalled me as does this idea of somebody lying in wait to kill a man who has never done them any harm at all."

Agatha took her in her arms and kissed her tenderly. "You have all my sympathy," said she. "I don't think I have ever felt so sorry for anybody as I do for you. Ran had no idea what he was doing when he bolted in that impulsive, Rannish manner yesterday. But I want you to be full of hope and courage. I believe that he will come back; and if, when he comes, he finds that you have been working in his absence to lift this weight which has rested so heavily

on his mind for years, why, won't that be splendid?"

The hope lit a spark in Jass's drowned eyes. She clung to Agatha. "I am lucky to have you," she murmured in choked accents.

Walter was pacing up and down with frowning forehead, considering the case. "What," asked he at length, "are you going to say to this—to put it mildly—injudicious person who has written to you with the object, apparently, of setting you against your husband? Was the letter anonymous?"

Jass hesitated. "No, it was not anonymous. The writer ought never to have written it, although it had just the opposite effect to that intended. I shall not answer it at all."

"You are wise," said he. "Later on, when we have this fellow by the heels, and we find out what steps Ran means to take in the matter, we can do as we think fit. For the present, let us keep all our knowledge to ourselves."

It was a matter of more difficulty for Jass to decide what she would do about writing to her father. Hector's visit and Hector's information must have put him into a state of great anxiety. But she decided to leave things as they were. A letter from her, written as optimistically as she could manage, was now on its way to him, and its arrival might soothe his worst fears.

Walter had dispatched old Christophe ahead to prepare the boat for them, and upon their arrival at the harbour that afternoon they found it awaiting them at the tiny jetty.

This was about half a mile east of the spot on the shore where Jacynth had dropped her wrist-watch. Walter put up the sail and they went over to the nearest isle, where there was a farm, a chapel, and a shrine. *Here they landed and explored a little, Walter doing*



all in his power to divert the girl's mind and interest her in outward things. She made a brave effort, but he could feel the strain it was to her, and how all her being was on the rack as she gazed upon the rocks and sands.

The breeze was so light and the sea so calm that Walter sailed out of the little harbour, to let her view the seaward aspect of the rock barriers which shield the coast thereabout. As he was calling her attention to a rock known as the *Tête de Mort*, astonishingly like a great skull, she became aware that her feet were cold, and, stooping to examine the reason, found the edge of her skirt soaking wet.

"Are you aware," said she, "what a lot of water there is in this boat?"

"Water?" Walter's mind left the coast, and concentrated itself upon what he saw.

"The boat is leaking," he said in astonishment; adding after a further instant's reflection, "the boat has been tampered with."

He opened a locker and took out a tin dipper, asking her to bale out while he altered the sail for a run back to land. This done, he examined the woodwork of the boat but could find no hole.

"This is confirmation, however," said he; "confirmation with a vengeance of our suspicions! Isn't it? It is also valuable evidence in another direction. This damage must have been done last night. The boat was only sent back from the boatwright's shed yesterday. The man who did it is therefore still in the neighbourhood, and doubtless believes that Ranulf is also. He is very likely on the watch now, and thinks I am Ranulf. He would suppose that you two might be so preoccupied with one another that you would not notice anything until you were too far out to get back. Ah, it's coming in much faster now! He probably

made a good-sized hole, and very nearly filled it with putty, knowing that as soon as the water got through, the force would push in the patch and enlarge the hole automatically. We must bale steadily."

Jacynth helped with a will. This was, indeed, as Walter said, strong confirmation of all their speculations.

The wind was now slightly against them, and a good deal of tacking was needed to get back as fast as possible. This compelled Walter to leave most of the baling to Mrs. Warristoun; and her feet and petticoats were soon wringing wet.

"It'll be as much as we can do to make it," said he. "But you have told me you can swim."

"Yes, but I have never swum in all my clothes. I'd rather not try, if you think we can manage without," said she, laughing.

"We'll do that, if only to disappoint anybody who may be on the watch. Here, let me take a hand!"

It was with a much relieved mind that Jacynth at last felt the firm boards of the jetty beneath her feet.

"Now," said Walter, "if you're not too tired, we'll go up to the station and warn the coastguard that this has been done. I won't wait even to discover the hole—can do that later."

The men on guard were slightly exasperated to hear what they came to tell, since the shore and the caves had been searched in vain all day.

However, even though they had not seen him, they declared most positively that he had not left the vicinity. There is but one road leading from Kerlistec, and that and the whole cliff were being constantly patrolled. The moment he showed himself he would be taken. They said that he had doubtless been quite unprepared for the watch which was almost immediately



set upon him, and they trusted that in a very few days' time hunger would bring him forth.

"You may sleep soundly to-night as far as he is concerned," Strickland assured her, as they returned to the château. "Ranulf has given him the slip completely."

In fact, the news was so far reassuring that Jacynth did succeed in getting some rest that night.

For the next few days she devoted herself to helping in the wards, putting on uniform every day, and not taking it off until late afternoon.

There were some very serious cases now in hospital, and her help was invaluable. The hard work dulled sorrow more or less, but it lay in wait for Jacynth every time she sat down for a moment's rest.

The only circumstance which gave her relief was the knowledge that the Stricklands were not aware of the state of things between Ranulf and herself—their "death-bed marriage," as he called it.

What a curious idea to come into a man's head! The oddness of it busied her brain continually. His own knowledge that he was marked for death, his determination to clinch this into certainty by accepting a job of the nature of a forlorn hope. His plan to put her into a position of safety and affluence and to save her from the heartbreak which a marriage with Hector must have entailed!

He had fixed upon her because he thought her honest. Having made his selection, nothing had deterred him. He knew her father to be the reverse of honest. Yet he trusted her. . . .

. . . Supposing she had done her duty and refused uncompromisingly. What would be the position now? Her father would be sadly leaving the Dale which he loved—wandering away without prospects for the future. She would be back at Mauby, earning her living,

and still under the impression that Hector had fled from Mannadale to escape entanglement with herself. But—Ranulf would have been safe—and with that came the acute question. Supposing that Ranulf had known that he could have bought his safety at the price of marriage with Adela—would he have accepted the position? Judging by the glimpses she had seen of him, she believed not.

And she knew that she wanted to see him again, more than she had ever wanted anything in her life—so urgently that it seemed to her as though he could not die so long as her imperious need persisted.

He had been absent almost a week when the moon was full. As Jacynth lay down in bed that night, and Maurette at her order drew back her curtains, she could see a path of white glory upon the sea, leading away into infinity.

There was still no news of any kind. The elusive Bastien had not been taken, and she had heard nothing of or from Ranulf.

For days past her restlessness had grown and grown, and to-night she felt as though it were literally impossible that she should lie down passive all through those moonlit hours while so much might be happening.

She was filled with a craving to be down there upon the sands, in the stillness of the night, alone. Surely she could elude the coastguards?

When she came off duty that afternoon she had felt too tired for a walk; and Strickland could not take her sailing, for he was awaiting the arrival of some fitting which he had ordered before he could adequately repair the boat, which proved to have been deliberately and very cunningly scuttled.

Now, her limbs were full of restless fire, and she thought that, if she could only satisfy the demand of



her muscles, and go for a walk, she might be able to sleep when she returned.

The other motive which lurked in her mind was one she was loth to admit. Somewhere out there upon the shore she believed that Bastien was still concealed. If this were so, she knew he must sometimes venture forth from his lurking-place to stretch his limbs. The time when he would be most likely to do this would be between midnight and dawn.

If she could but do what the coastguard had failed to do—if she could but get a sight of him, so as to guide them to his lair the following day!

She knew that the idea was ridiculous. She was not likely to succeed where they failed. . . .

And yet her desire drove her, and after lying still as long as she possibly could endure it, she arose, and clad herself in a suit very much the colour of the moon-lit sands, and soft, rubber-soled shoes. She put on no hat, thinking her own fair hair would be less conspicuous; and, thus equipped, she slipped through from her own room to Ranulf's, from which it was perfectly easy for her to leave the château unseen, for it had a balcony with a stair descending to the garden. As she crept down it, she wondered whether Madame de Kerlistec had ever gone that way to meet Ran's father in the summer nights of old.

During the past week she had been in and out continually with Walter, and was beginning to know the lay of the land. Avoiding the main paths, she made her way down a side walk leading to a small postern.

(Perhaps he used to enter thus, and creep up the staircase, and she would open the window at the top and admit him! Suppose that Ranulf were to come back so? . . .)

She was through the little wicket now, out upon the road—had crossed it, and was creeping down a field



which was a short cut to the sea, keeping herself well within the shadow of the thick hedge of *ajonc*, whose blossoms charged the night with their heavy perfume.

Nothing stirred. The sleeping hamlet lay moon-washed and still as a painting under the wonderful blue heaven.

She came down upon the rock-strewn sands in the deep shadow thrown by the *Sentinelle* Rock, upon whose summit *Notre Dame des Flots* looked out from her small stone shrine upon the waters.

It was her intention to remain here in hiding until the coastguard had come by, and to move on when he had passed, to the rock-pool near which she had seen the so-called fisherman.

He came, in about ten minutes' time—a sturdy “gabelou,” padding as noiselessly as a cat, and unheard until he was close to her. He did not leave the shore at the place where she had come down from the cliffs, but continued his way along the sea-base of the *Sentinelle*, where the receding tide allowed him to pass dryshod.

He was thus out of sight in a minute or two, and she instantly slipped from her hiding-place and moved along very cautiously in the shadow until she came to a place where the rocks ran back in a V-shaped space, leaving a pointed bay of moon-flooded sand. This she dare not cross, so she crept up along the edge of the open space, back towards the main cliff. At the point of the V she found herself right under the beeting mass of the *falaise*, and paused there a few minutes to listen to the silence and the faint music of the hardly-breaking wavelets, washing the distant margin.

Just beside her, a tiny stream of fresh water, hardly more than a trickle, descended the face of the rock and dripped from its weed-fringed base, losing itself



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in the sand. She heard each successive drop as it fell, like the patter of rain; and then her acutely-listening ear became gradually conscious of another sound—a rustling of movement—stealthy movement—quite close to the back of her head.

## CHAPTER XXX

### JACYNTH MAKES A CAPTURE

THE faint rustling noise was accompanied by sounds suggesting the rooting or snuffling of a pig; or perhaps more like the panting of a hound which has run too far or too fast. Not quite like that, either; a choked, suffocating breath, drawn faster and faster through lungs which seemed about to refuse their office. To the ear of the expert nurse, it was like the breathing of a patient in the acute stage of pneumonia.

Jacynth sat absolutely still, only shrinking a little further downward as she crouched, trusting that she was quite invisible in the soft gloom. A dark mass was slowly wriggling its way down among the boulders. Something human—yes, a man—gasping, even whimpering, under his breath, with muttered words, one or two of which she caught with difficulty:

*"Par ici—par ici—de l'eau—amour de Dieu—d'eau douce."*

Reaching the point where the rocks fell away to the level of the shore, the crawling thing rolled over, fell heavily, grasped the sand with clutching fingers, and gave an inarticulate cry of joy or thankfulness, as of one approaching the goal. Then, hauling itself along on hands and knees, lifted its head to where the fresh water dripped from the green-bearded rock-edge—sucked and choked awhile and presently lay still.

With caution, Jacynth approached. Here there could be little to fear. Nevertheless, she drew from her pocket a large clasp-knife which she had found



upon the dressing-table in Ranulf's room. With this in her hand she crept up to where the body lay, and, feeling the pulse, quickly realised that the prostrate man was in an advanced stage of physical collapse.

Taking him by the feet, she succeeded in dragging him forward a few paces, to where the moonlight fell upon him, and rolled him over upon his back. There could be no doubt of his being the man she sought.

Triumph surged over her. Here was Ran's enemy, helpless in her hands! But the feeling was quickly merged in that of her own helplessness, to the full as great as his. By the time she had run to the *Château* and back, the fugitive might, by some delirious exercise of strength, creep back to that lair which his urgent thirst had compelled him for the moment to forsake. Even now he was beginning to move and mutter.

To summon the coastguard was her only course. Springing up, she ran out upon the sands in the brilliant moonlight, and stood there in full view, waving her arms and beckoning.

In less than one minute a man was speeding towards her. She had forgotten that not only was the beach patrolled, but that a constant watch was also kept upon the cliff above. The sentry up there had seen her, as she crept cautiously along in the shadow of the rocks, and had at once started to make his way to the spot.

Her triumphant "*Le voilà!*" was rather a humiliation for him—though, as a fact, her capture was good luck rather than good management on her part. She happened to have arrived at the moment when the prisoner's strength had failed. Had he continued to lie where he fell, he must have been duly found by the next patrol.

Fortunately, no doubt existed in her mind as to what was the only thing to be done; and, somewhat to her

surprise, the coastguards were ready to obey her orders.

The Stricklands were in the habit of walking up from the cottage to the hospital about eight o'clock every morning. Upon this particular occasion, they were surprised to find Dr. Bent awaiting them at the garden gate, with a piece of most unexpected news.

Mrs. Warristoun had gone forth at dead of night and had captured the mysterious man. She had caused the coastguards to carry him to Kerlistec, had prepared a bed for him in the panelled sitting-room upstairs, roused the doctor, put herself into uniform, and assumed charge of the case. She was now in the sick-room, where she was working with her customary skill and assiduity. She sent her orders by the doctor. The poor wretch was suffering from the worst form of "Spanish influenza" complicated with double pneumonia; and the infection must not be allowed to spread. She therefore forbade Miss Strickland to go near the room. All possible precautions had been taken, the patient having been brought in by the garden staircase, and being placed in a room far from the hospital sleeping-quarters.

It was nevertheless necessary that Mr. Strickland should go once into the room for the purpose of identifying the sufferer. The doctor would lend him an overall and give him a gargle for his throat. It was essential for her to know without delay whether or no she had in her hands the chauffeur, d'Aubigny.

These tidings so staggered Agatha that she turned quite white. One point in the whole business exercised her mind.

"But, doctor, what about her? Suppose she herself *should* take this dreadful thing? What would Mr.



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Warristoun say to us, who were left in charge of her? Oh, you should not have given way to her."

Dr. Bent shrugged his shoulders with a smile.

"The young lady showed me in the plainest way that she is mistress here," he replied. "I really had no choice. My *rôle* was obedience merely. But don't worry, Miss Strickland. She is a professional, and it isn't in the least likely that she will succumb, unless she is allowed to overdo it. Doctors and nurses don't take infection, you know. I will look after her, and see that she is duly relieved and not allowed to be on duty too many hours; and indeed, without her I hardly know how we should have contrived to nurse him at all. You'd better come along at once, Strickland. She's all on tenterhooks until she knows she has got hold of the right man; though I fear there is but small chance of his living to confess. I give him forty-eight hours."

Without further words, Walter followed him upstairs, and into the frivolous Louis Seize boudoir, where Laure de Kerlistec looked down smiling from her frame upon the wall on the wreck of the son whom she had never loved.

Strickland's eyes met those of Ranulf's wife across the bed, and he saw the glitter of excitement hardly to be controlled. Then his gaze fell upon the motionless, poulticed form. The sick man's eyes were closed, and his face drawn, yet Strickland felt no doubt. It was Adela's French chauffeur who lay there.

"That's the man, right enough," he murmured; and Jacynth gave a sob of sheer emotion.

They went together from the room and stood just without, in the passage. "He shan't die till he has confessed. I will hold him alive by the sheer force of my will until he has confessed," she muttered, glaring *absurdly* upon Walter, with fists and teeth clenched.

"It's not only Ranulf's life to be made safe—his name must be cleared too."

"Mrs. Ran," said Walter reprovingly, "you've been very rash! Was it treating us fairly, after what I had said to you, for you to go out upon the sands alone, late at night?"

She looked apologetic. "I couldn't sleep," she murmured pleadingly. "I had to do something, and this came so clearly to my mind, it was like a call. I had no definite intentions, I just went out as though something drove me! And I believe it did. Poor creature! What he must have suffered up there, parched with fever, and with nothing to drink! When he chose his hiding-place, he did not calculate upon being too ill to go to the spring! I suppose thirst got the better of him at last, and he crept out. When I saw him he was far too ill to be dangerous."

"As it happened," admitted Walter, but still reprovingly. "You might have got a bullet through your head quite easily."

"He had a revolver on him, loaded in every chamber," admitted the girl, with a shamefaced smile. "But I can't regret it—I mean, I am more than thankful that I went! For I have been feeling as though I simply could not bear another day and night of the suspense, and now I have something definite to do—something worth while—something that will hold me and grip me and keep me too busy to be eaten up with anxiety! I have to keep this poor thing alive until Ranulf has been cleared, and I mean to do it, too! Ran was publicly accused—he shall be publicly cleared, I am determined about that! Don't look displeased with me—don't!"

She coaxed a reluctant smile from him before slipping into the sickroom again.

"It is a good thing," remarked Walter to Agatha



when he rejoined her. "She is right there: of course it is an excellent thing that she has something to take her thoughts off just now. And there is another point which will be of the greatest help to her. She is so relieved by the knowledge that Ranulf is not being dogged by this assassin that she is inclined to think quite lightly of the danger of his present expedition. She is hopeful now that he will come back—she expects it. But this is the seventh day of his absence, and if we hear nothing at all by to-morrow night, she is to have his letter the morning after."

It was true that the capture of d'Aubigny was for the moment calming Jacynth's nerves wonderfully. The tumult of conflicting feeling which had grown in her ever since she realised the self-sacrificing nature of Ranulf's marriage was soothed to a remarkable degree by this opportunity which fate had cast into her lap. She had been enabled to do something to even up the balance between them. By securing the real murderer—and also, so help her God, his testimony, she would be doing even more for her husband than he had done for her.

At their last interview she had been so stupefied by what he had disclosed, so bewildered by the new light cast upon his character and that of Hector, that she had been unable to appreciate, to discriminate, or even to feel.

Now . . . she could look into those odd eyes when next she saw them, with the knowledge that in his absence she had done work for him. Walter's conclusion was quite correct. Knowing that she held chained the lurking peril which for so long had threatened Ranulf, she had no real belief in other dangers. She felt hopeful of his safety, even if not certain of it.

Thus she was able to fling herself whole-heartedly into her handling of the case. Each resource of the



most modern scientific treatment was remembered and practised by her. Her ears were ever open for the sound of any words escaping in the delirium of d'Aubigny's fever which might bear upon the crucial point; and several fragments of his talk were by her committed to writing, more particularly a pitiful prayer to his mother to understand and forgive his dereliction of duty on account of his love. She, he pointed out, had sinned for love. Therefore she should judge him mercifully.

The fact that the doctor expected immediate death only stimulated the nurse to fresh effort; and after twenty-four hours he was fain to admit that the unremitting tendance did show results. The case had been aggravated by exposure and neglect; and as the warmth, comfort, and nourishment ameliorated the condition, the temperature fell, and some natural sleep was obtained. Dr. Bent was still persuaded that the end must be fatal, the tissue of the lungs was too far destroyed by inflammation to make recovery possible. But he began to think that there might be a lucid interval before the end, and that Mrs. Warristoun might actually obtain her ardently desired testimony.

"After all," he urged, "you can't wish him to live, for in case of your curing him, he would have to take his trial for murder, would he not? Surely he had better die now."

But for the next few hours the patient gained ground, rather than losing it. Once, in the late afternoon of the second day, she thought that his eyes were fixed upon her with recognition. But apparently his weakness was too great for his mind to hold the idea. He slipped away into a doze.

*On the morning of the day following, Walter came to the door after breakfast, and beckoned her from*



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the room. It was a day of mist and complete stillness. The sea was veiled in opal haze, and a sense of unreality brooded over everything.

"Jacynth," said Walter hurriedly—they had now been using each other's Christian names for some days—"I have something to do which I am loth to do. The day that Ran went away, he left a letter which he charged me to deliver to you upon the eighth day of his absence, unless he either returned or sent a message. As you know, he has not returned and we have no news of him. Thus, I dare not withhold his message from you——"

"Why do you want to withhold it?" she asked, the colour springing to her face as she stretched her hand to take it.

"I will tell you why, quite frankly. It is because I fear that he intended it to come to you only as a message from the dead."

She took the envelope from him, holding it crushed between her two hands, and her eyes dwelt upon him like searchlights.

"Walter—do you know anything you are hiding from me?"

"I do not—truly I do not. Except that perhaps I think you hardly realise upon what a dangerous errand he was bound."

"Yes. But then he was convinced that this creature was on his track—he thought that if he came through his business safely, he would fall the other way——"

"Quite so. Yes, of course. I am glad you are still hoping."

"Walter, there *is* something you are concealing from me."

"Well—God forgive me if I am doing wrong in repeating it, but—it is only that he let fall some words—*when first he came*—he and I were talking most of the

night—and I gathered, more from what he did not say than from what he said, that he—was tired of life. He had volunteered for a job which was being offered to anyone who—had no wish to return.”

He was unprepared for Jacynth's silence. Her complete lack of surprise showed him that there was something in the situation which she knew of and he did not.

“You see,” she said at last, “he volunteered for that work . . . before he and I . . . before he knew that . . .”

“Ah, I begin to understand! Afterwards, he had to keep his word, *coûte qui coûte*. And so he dared not stay even to bid you farewell, in case of faltering.”

There came a flash into her calm eyes—lighting up unexplored possibilities. “Don't you think God will reward such splendid unselfishness?”

His own eyes were dim with pity. “I am convinced of that; but God's rewards don't always take the form we would plan for them, you know.”

She turned pale. “No. That is true. ‘Other things in other worlds, beloved’—she paused upon the quotation, then broke out as though the cry were forced from her. “But I—I have had no time! No time! Oh, don't you think God will take that into consideration. When you recall what his life has been, don't you think God will give me time to show him—to do *something* . . .” she could not go on.

Walter's very heart melted in him. His sister and he had thought Ran's wife terribly reserved. To-day he was behind the barriers.

“Courage! There is no end to God's mercy. Ran is in His hands and so are you. The giving of this letter doesn't mean that he is dead. Run away and read what he says. I'll send a nurse to sit with d'Aubigny.”



## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE LAST REASON

IT was always to the little sunk garden with the high yew hedges that Jacynth fled for solitude or quiet. She was beginning to look upon it as home—to gaze upon its rock-plants and its quaint old fountain with proprietary affection. Thither she escaped with her letter, and sat herself down near the musical tinkle of the water.

It was late in the season and the only blooms still remaining were the dahlias and hollyhocks in the herbaceous border just within the guardian hedge; but, appropriately enough, the dominant note of colour was supplied by a thick edging of those orange marigolds which French peasants call *soucis*.

Among the anecdotes of Ran's childhood which she had heard from Agatha, was one connected with the fountain. The garden had been his mother's daily haunt, and one day, shortly after her death, the boy, in a childish passion of grief, determined to stop the jet of water which the faun blew from his mouth. "He isn't a bit sorry my mummie is gone—he goes on just as usual, and he shan't!" Ranolf had declared; and, rushing to the basin, had splashed in, climbed the pedestal, and thrust a fat, sturdy hand over the up-turned mouth. The result had been to drench himself from head to foot—and subsequent sharp punishment from an unsympathetic tutor.

*Just like Ran! Something is wrong: stop it at*

once! No matter how! . . . So had he gone to work in her own case.

"They never understood him," said Agatha, more than once. "His father especially was most unjust. He thought him so unpardonable ugly. Now I never could call Ran ugly—not with that mouth. Have you ever noticed what a noble mouth he has?"

Ugly or no, he certainly had a face one remembered very vividly. More especially, perhaps, the line between the lips. Why had he first presented himself to her bawling with those same lips, with that fine voice, a senseless, ribald song?

Such thoughts were with her as she drew forth the letter, and noted that it had been written after his abrupt, inconclusive exit—after their parting. Its first blunt words hit her in the face.

"When you get this I shall be dead, so why not let myself go on paper for a few minutes? No, you little darling, what would be the good of that? If I covered a dozen sheets of paper I could never explain to you how I feel about you. I daresay they told you—in fact I know they must have, because you mentioned it once to me—that I used to be in love with A. Belairs. So I was, and more fool I. Falling in love is a madness of the blood which attacks healthy young male animals. Of course I feel like that about you, too; but somehow it hardly counts. It seems the least important part of the whole business. These things are most curious. You have talked to me very little, and even that little always against your will. Yet I understand you, and you me. I feel I could say anything to you, if I thought you'd listen. I used at first to hope you might. I couldn't seriously believe that *you* cared for Hector. I thought to myself: Which *is better* for her? Shall I let her marry him, and watch



her losing a bit of her happiness every day, until I see her down in the mire, the slave of a drunkard? Or shall I bully her into marrying me—hating me—thinking me an unfeeling brute—and trust to her realising slowly as time goes on that I'm not as bad as she thought and that I'd do anything she chose to command?

"That thought enabled me to hold on, though I felt the most unspeakable cad. But on our wedding-day—after it was done, and I had you safe as far as legal hold goes—why then, somehow, I knew you could never forgive me. I knew I had charged a stone wall with my head for a battering-ram; and it doesn't need our friend Sherlock to say which gets the worst of that encounter.

"So I felt it was the end. I had to pass out and leave you free and untouched. That was all the reparation I could make. I never was a comfortable person to live with, and I daresay I should have plagued you, even if I could have persuaded you to try the experiment. But before I go, I want you to know the real reason—the one that ate up all the others, like Aaron's rod—or was it Moses'?—Just the one poor selfish excuse—I love you.

"So you see, there's no way out. I couldn't stay with you without importuning you and I'm determined you shan't have any excuse to hate me worse than you do already. I daren't come back to say good-bye, for I am feeling such a fool, with you here, actually in my house, in the room that used to be my mother's, that I can't be answerable for my own behaviour. Anything might happen. I must bolt.

"All you have to do is to be happy; and then perhaps, if I am in a place where they allow one to know things, I shall feel a bit bucked. And I must be content if, when you are making a list of the men who

have loved you, you find a little corner somewhere to add the futile words—'Also Ran.'

"God bless you."

Such was the writing. Jass read it as in a dream. The day was dream-like—the mist wrapped all the distances, and lay in trembling drops upon the autumnal leaves and flowers. It seemed to her as though the garden waited to know what she would do—this woman for whom their master had laid down his hot young life.

The completeness of her conquest of this man made her tremble. He whom she had known so confident, so arrogant—even truculent in his dealings with all others. He was just a humble, devoted boy, her knight and champion, who

"Poured life out—proffered it—'Half a glance  
Of those eyes of yours, and I drop the glass.'"

Without warning she broke down. She had been on duty now for two whole nights. She wept until she was so exhausted that her weeping passed into sleep; and Agatha, coming soft-footed an hour later, found her slumbering, wet-eyed, with the letter under her cheek, and departed as she came, merely covering the recumbent form with a rug.

Jacynth struggled back into consciousness with the idea that she had been called. Maurette was standing at a little distance, as though desirous of delivering a message, but doubtful as to whether she ought to awaken her mistress. Jacynth sprang to her feet, and then the maid came forward and explained that she had been sent to fetch madame, to inform her that the *patient's* condition had undergone a change. Monsieur



Streeckland had summoned the curé at once, according to madame's orders.

"Then he is conscious?" gasped Jacynth.

"Yes, madame, quite conscious—and so I come to tell madame, and just as I reach the hall a gentleman arrive to see her—an English Milor, I think."

Jacynth sat trying to take in these two pieces of exciting intelligence. She was sceptical concerning the second. English Milors would find it difficult to reach this lost corner of Brittany. But the news concerning the chauffeur was by far the more engrossing, and as she hastened back towards the house, it occupied all her thoughts.

Suppose that, after all her care and watching, the man were even now confessing, and she should lose the important moment! She began to run through the garden, obsessed by the thought of what might be taking place by the sick bed; and, so running, came suddenly face to face with Hector Monkland, who stood, clad in oilskins, upon the steps of the terrace.

"Jacynth!" He came forward in eager haste.

The sight of him was so amazing that for a minute she had nothing to say, and merely stared while he began volubly to explain that he had induced a great friend of his, who commanded a "mystery ship" and was busy in those parts, to smuggle him across, that the ship was lying about five miles out—that he could take her off that very day.

Her bewilderment passed with the first few words he spoke. She saw the finger of fate in this.

Her expression was full of a strange air of exaltation, and he broke off, hesitating in what he was saying, because of the strangeness of it.

"You have come in the very nick of time," said she, with a thrill in her suppressed voice. "You may



perhaps be able to hear for yourself—there is no telling. I think you had better follow me, please.”

He was relieved by her words, though he thought her manner peculiar. “So I did right to come?” he queried, following her rapid steps.

“I think perhaps you did,” was her answer. “It is very necessary that you should know the truth—so that you may be able to publish it.”

Fleetly she entered the hall and he hastened after her, passing up the stairs and along the corridor to the door of the sick-room.

Strickland was standing just without, and he held up his hand for silence as Jacynth approached. His eyes then fell upon Monkland, and at him he stared with a look so surprised as to border upon horror.

At the moment, from within the room, there sounded the tinkle of a tiny bell. Strickland and Jacynth at once sank to their knees. Hector, mystified, remained standing, gazing from one to the other in a state of such complete bewilderment as might have provoked a smile in less absorbing circumstances.

To the visitor it seemed as if the succeeding silence, broken only by the sound of a low voice from the room within, lasted for hours. It was, however, in reality not more than ten minutes later that the curé softly opened the door.

“He has made his confession, madame,” said he gently, with his eyes fixed kindly upon Jacynth’s intensely appealing face. “As you requested me, I have written it down. He is quite willing that it should be made public.”

“Is he . . . gone?” asked Jacynth in the lowest whisper.

“No. He yet lives, but I think he will not speak again.”

“You permit that I enter—I and this English gentle-

man, my friend? It is of the highest importance that he should see this man."

"Enter, if you will pass your word not to disturb him. He has made his peace with God."

So saying, the old priest stood aside, and to the still greater amazement of Captain Monkland, Jacynth took his hand, made a gesture for silence, and led him in. Afterwards he confessed that it was Ranulf himself whom he expected to see lying there in extremis.

Though the window stood widely open, the air smelt of incense. A cheerful wood fire leaped and crackled on the hearth. A little boy in a cotta was collecting the sacred vessels and stowing them away in a bag. He turned wide, surprised eyes upon the stranger gentleman.

The bed was very white and very neat, the limbs of the dying man were stretched out straight as though life were already fled. One hand was on his chest and clasped a crucifix. His eyes were closed.

Hector was so surprised that he let fall a sharp exclamation:

"D'Aubigny!"

"Oh, *hush!*" breathed Jacynth; but the dying man had heard. His eyes opened and he gazed upon the two. Evidently he knew them. As evidently he was past speech—and past caring for any of the things in the world he was leaving. It was like the backward glance of one passing out through a door. It travelled beyond them, to where stood the curé; upon whose face the wistful look fixed itself as upon its last link with earth.

The old man came to the bedside, knelt stiffly down, and began the muttered recitation of the prayers for a departing soul. Jacynth made a sign to Hector and moved towards the door. As she passed, the kneeling priest extended his hand and slipped a paper into hers.

She emerged into the corridor and closed the door. Walter was still waiting there, and Agatha had joined him.

"Come!" Jacynth's voice pulsed with her triumph. "We will go downstairs and read this. Will you follow me, Captain Monkland?"

Hector by this time was past wondering at anything. He obeyed without a word and they went down to the hall. The door of it was widely open to the windless mist without. The stillness and greyness of it all gave the impression, he thought, not of peace, but of breathless waiting for some climax. Nobody but themselves was present. Jacynth gave the paper to Walter, and placed a chair for Hector, who was looking worn and ill.

"There is d'Aubigny's confession," said she. "Please read it aloud."

Hector gazed at her as upon a vision. She was so remote, so completely detached from him that he had the illusion of seeing her recede into a distance whither he could not pursue. She was almost as white as the coiffe she wore, and her small features looked as though carved in ivory, so that the soft golden-brown of eyes and lashes contrasted more noticeably than usual. Walter began to read, but the captain stopped him irritably.

"You must please translate. I do not understand."

With an apology, Strickland rendered the confession into English.

It began with an account of how, as a mere boy, the narrator had been taken to his father's side as he lay dying, and made to swear a solemn oath to avenge the family honour. One fact which was mentioned was quite new to the hearers, namely, that the Comte's and Ranulf's fathers had already met—although the *duel had been kept jealously secret—in the lovely wood*



which formed part of the estates of the château. In this duel Warristoun had wounded his enemy; which wound, though not immediately mortal, had so affected his health as to cause death within two years. As the young man grew up and realised to what he had pledged himself, he decided to change his name. That which he chose was really one of his own Christian names. At first he had remained in France, and had confined himself to the intention of killing the elder Warristoun. Once he had fired at him and missed—once he put a bullet through his hat. Then the old man came no more to France, and shut himself up so carefully in England that d'Aubigny saw that he also must contrive to go thither. He had himself taught to drive a car—it being at that time hard to get chauffeurs—and succeeded in obtaining a situation in a family related to the Monklands, who lived close to Eston-garth.

When he heard of Guy's engagement to his mistress there was jealous passion mingled with the fanaticism which urged him to the murder. But, the deed done, his highly-stung, sensitive temperament was torn with remorse. He clutched at the chance given him by Adela's preference for Ranulf to decide that he would sooner break his oath than that she should suffer. Ranulf's marriage to another woman had changed all that. His spirit rose to avenge not merely his family feud, but the supposed wrongs of the woman he adored. He made up his mind to execute the final vengeance; and, having learned that Warristoun meant to go to Kerlistec, had sneaked off without leave, and had easily got across, aboard a French trawler, from a Yorkshire seaport, by pretending that he had information of value with regard to that part of the coast.

*Such was the confession—almost word for word*

what Jacynth had foreseen it must be; but it fell like a blow upon Captain Monkland.

"Oh, but this can't be true," was the first thing he said—not that he doubted the truth of the story, but that he was determined to reject it.

"Men do not lie to God upon their death-bed," said Walter, somewhat sternly. "There is, moreover, no escape from belief in the truth of this confession, since it is fully borne out by all the facts in our possession."

Hector, clenching his hands together, gazed beseechingly at Jacynth. She was standing by the table, her two hands behind her, and she was gazing into vacancy with a rapt look. She seemed hardly conscious of his presence. When he remembered the letter he had sent off to her—a letter written in the first fierce throes of a mad jealousy, carefully nursed by Adela—the colour rushed to his very brow.

He could not, for the moment, speak; and he was still fumbling for words when Mrs. Warristoun's clear voice fell upon the stillness, addressing not himself, but Strickland.

"Walter, will you please see that Captain Monkland has some lunch before he leaves? I am sure he will understand that I have no time just now to give him. I know he will excuse me, seeing how much there is for me to do and think of." She went a few steps towards the stairs; and then, perhaps, something in the abject nature of Monkland's confusion touched her, for she paused and spoke to him.

"I rely upon you to let Miss Bellairs know the truth—to see that everyone in Estondale knows the truth. I will ask Mr. Strickland to explain to you how this poor man, d'Aubigny, came into our hands."

By this time Monkland had pulled himself together. *He sprang* to his feet. "So you dismiss me—like—like *this*—when I have come at the risk of my life. . . ."



She looked troubled, but as if the thing that troubled her were a long way off, and she could not concentrate her mind upon it.

"You must not think that I do not appreciate your kindness in coming here, in face of all the difficulties of such a journey," she said softly, with a memory of her own late voyage in her mind. "But you will remember that I did not ask you to come. I must wish you good-bye."

She did not even shake hands. She went away like a girl walking in her sleep—passed up the stairs, stumbled along the corridor, groping through mists of darkness, entered her own room, and sank down in a quivering heap.

For suddenly her triumph had turned to ashes—suddenly she knew that all this—the confession—the vindication—the knowledge of future immunity for the house of Warristoun—had come too late.

*"When you read this I shall be dead."*

Dead! And she knew not how, nor where, nor even when! Dead! And she had nothing! No hope, no chance to know him better, to correct her false impressions, to grow to understand him.

He had gone away hopeless—as Walter said, not caring for life. He had probably not striven very hard to escape the dangers into which he had walked open-eyed: he had not desired to return: for he believed she would be happier without him.

That morning the news in the papers was full of triumph. The opinion was growing in force that Germany was beaten. It was as though one could hear, far off, the first faint shouts of victory.

But for her there seemed only the bitterness of defeat.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE HOSPITAL CLOSES

IT was not until a fortnight after Hector's surprising visit to Kerlistec that the dreaded War Office telegram arrived, regretting that Private Warristoun was missing. Although they had felt certain that such could be the only explanation of the absence of news, the statement was yet a shock to the Stricklands.

As for Jacynth, ever since her reading of her husband's letter—that letter which had come to her as a message from the dead—she had given the impression of one who lives in a dream.

The death of d'Aubigny had taken away that need for ceaseless activity which had formed the main prop of her self-command; and for a few days after the coming of the telegram, those who watched her had grave fears. She did not sleep, and wandered about, indoors or out of doors, her only employment being the preparation of a full account of the discovery of Guy Warristoun's murderer, which she sent to the chief English newspapers. Agatha afterwards thought that this was the one thing which saved her from complete collapse. It just tided her through the worst; and however listless she was, she yet was always able to show interest over reading the press comment upon the case, and the excited screeds sent to her from her sisters, with the account of what everybody in the Dale had said and done.

After a while she turned once more to nursing in the wards; and Agatha encouraged this, for it made her



more human, even though she was sometimes overtired and irritable.

The signing of the armistice fell upon her like a fresh blow. It was so very few weeks later: had he but waited until then—had he allowed himself a short respite—he need never have gone at all upon his terrible errand.

It seemed, however, that she could not speak of it. The Stricklands knew from Maurette that she did not sleep—in fact, Walter had sat up all one night in fear lest she might go out alone upon the shore and fling herself into the sea. She divulged nothing of her feelings, however; and beyond the fact that she was even more silent and passive than usual there was little sign of the inward fever.

The end of November saw also the end of the hospital. It was a long way to send men, and when the congestion ceased, no more cases arrived. It was this cessation of occupation which Agatha really dreaded most for Jacynth. She was a good deal astonished to see the girl appear, on the morning after the departure of the last patient, in a delicate mist-blue frock, suggestive of anything but mourning.

A big, welcoming wood-fire burned in the hall, and that morning they had breakfast there, all together, English fashion.

Agatha was wondering how to introduce any talk of future plans. She and Walter longed to go to England to keep Christmas—not having been home for more than four years. Yet they felt that they could not leave Jacynth alone, and she seemed to have no thought of departure.

It was a surprise when she said: "Walter, do you suppose I could buy, or hire, a horse to ride, anywhere round about?"



"A horse? Why, I hardly know. I should think so," he replied, with eyes fixed keenly upon her.

"Now that there is no more nursing to be done I shall want exercise," she remarked.

"Then—then you think of staying on here?" began Agatha tentatively.

Jass set her feet upon the fender and stared into the flames. "Yes," said she, "I shall stop here until Ran comes back."

"Alone?" said Walter quickly.

She started. Then turned her face, full of compunction, to La Dame Bleue and laid her hands over those which lay in Agatha's lap.

"My dears, you don't think I'm such a selfish pig as to want to tie you both here to keep me company? On no account! Maurette and I shall get on admirably."

"Nonsense, Jass—Walter and I live here. It is our home," said Agatha quietly.

Jacynth gripped the hands she held. "Now, none of that! You and Walter are not going to sacrifice yourselves for me! I have had enough of that kind of thing. You are both going home as soon as the Government will hand you out permits. I hear there is no coal and very little food in England, but I expect you won't mind that."

"You still hope for news then, Jass?" asked Walter with elaborate carelessness.

"Of course I hope for news. If Ran were dead, I should have been officially notified, shouldn't I?"

"If they knew for certain; but missing——"

"Missing means nothing. They expected him to disappear. That was what he had to do. He will come back again all right; and he will find me waiting where he left me."

The Stricklands exchanged glances.

"How long shall you wait, Jass?"



"I have just explained. I shall wait until Ran comes back."

Walter reflected. "There is something in what you say about the coal and rations," he remarked at last. "Here we have wood in plenty and all the simple food we want. It might be wiser not to risk England before the spring."

"Now take care, Walter! That sounds to me horribly like self-immolation," said Jass menacingly, "and please remember, I won't hear of it. If Ran hadn't had a fatal passion for that kind of thing he would not have gone, and—and—that is, he would be here now, with me."

She made a gesture with her hands, rose and went to the stair-foot. "You write and book your passages without an hour's delay," said she flippantly. "You won't get them all in a minute, you know. I'm going out."

She ascended the stairs and the two looked at one another in a kind of anguish.

"I would give much," said Walter, "to know just what it was that went wrong between those two."

"That he should be gone to his death without a chance of any explanations between them—it's enough to send her mad, poor child," sighed Agatha.

"And Monkland," pursued Walter, lighting his pipe, "where did he come in?"

"That visit of his was most astonishing."

"And from that day to this she has never referred to it! Never once!"

"She dare not open the subject, for fear of a breakdown."

"Yet she thinks of nothing else."

"Nothing. It is out of the question that we leave her here alone, Walter—even though she may look upon us as a nuisance."

"Agreed. God help her, poor girl!"

He broke off, for, at the moment, Mrs. Warristoun came downstairs again with her hat and coat on and a basket in her hand.

She had early taken the habit of going to lay flowers upon the grave of Charles d'Aubigny Frontinac, *dernier* Comte de Kerlistec; and one day she had met the old curé in the churchyard and he had shown her the grave of Ranulf's mother and told her its pathetic history. Mrs. Warristoun had died at Kerlistec, where for several years she had lived neglected.

In the absence of her husband, owing to the fact that it took some time to ascertain where he was, nobody had ventured to sanction the considerable expense of conveying the body to England for burial. Meanwhile they were confronted by the distressing fact that in France it could not be laid in consecrated ground.

In this dilemma, Strickland and the curé had conferred together; with the result that Walter purchased from the curé a small bit of land, from a field which was his private property, and which abutted upon the churchyard. The section of stone wall at that point was pulled down, and re-erected, at Walter's expense, so as to bring the purchased plot inside. This leniency towards heresy was not objected to by anyone in the village, for all the poor loved madame, who had frequently worshipped among them.

The quaint alcove where the grave stood had, before the war, been bright with flowers; and it now occurred to Jacynth that, in the present vacancy of her life, it would be an occupation for her to set this garden in order, and plant it with roots for next spring.

Walter stood upon the terrace to watch her depart, Maurette in attendance, carrying a well-filled basket and some tools; and he breathed once more the prayer: "God help her!"



He then sat down, in a gleam of wintry sunlight, to glance over the exciting news of the day.

November is very kind to Brittany. The air was still mild, the woods still glowed with golden and flame-brown foliage, the sea to-day was actually blue, and broke with calm plashings upon the clean sand.

Walter looked up from his reading to see the postwoman come ambling along with her wallet of letters. She stopped before the château gates and held up an envelope.

"A vous, monsieur!"

Walter rose and went down the path to the gate, to save the good lady the trouble of coming in. He took the letter from her between the iron bars with a pleasant greeting. She chattered a few minutes about the armistice and the greatness of France, and then went on her way, while Walter leisurely returned to the terrace, and readjusted his glasses to read the address.

Then he turned white, and gave a queer cry. The writing was Ran's writing, and the postmark was Tréguier.

It was some moments before his sight was clear enough to enable him to master its contents. And, as he read, he laughed loud and long, so that Agatha, who was superintending the rearrangement of furniture in the rooms whence it had been taken to make room for beds, came running to share the joke.

"Here's wonderful news indeed!" he cried. "Brace yourself, Agatha. Ran has come through! He's not only alive, he's in fair health, and writes from Tréguier!"

"Why, God be praised for that, Walter! But is it so very funny? I don't know what there is to laugh at in the dear old boy's survival."

"Certainly not! No, the joke is in the situation *as he now sees it!* It appears that the marriage was

arranged with the view of guaranteeing a prosperous widowhood to Jass. He has done all he knew to play the game, but he hasn't succeeded in getting picked off, and he doesn't know what to do for the moment."

"Walter, how absolutely ridiculous! What can he mean?"

"He is terribly serious, I assure you. He thinks he has made a hideous mess of things. He seems to have had a narrow shave, and a bad bout of influenza with complications. But now he wants to know what I think he had better do. He expects to get caught by d'Aubigny sooner or later, and he thinks the quickest way to bring it off would be for him to appear in this village. The question is, what would Jass say? He dare not face her."

"Walter, he must be crazy."

"No, no. You don't quite understand. He explains here to me, more or less. Sit down, woman, and give me your exclusive attention. He tells me that Jacynth does not care a pin for him, and that she never pretended to. He knew it all along, and he says he literally bullied her into marrying him. His own reasons for such a marriage are very characteristic. He thought her the most honest girl he had ever met, and he was anxious to have somebody to whom to bequeath his money, and so on. Guy broke the entail, you may remember, and Ranulf is in a position to make anybody his heir. He detests Hector Monkland, and was determined that even though he had to go under, Hector should never inherit the Place. He has, as it were, forced great benefits upon his wife, against her will, and without demanding from her anything in return. Now his pride winces away from the thought of presenting himself alive, lest she should say: 'And so, you see, after all—he is here, and I am his legal wife, and here is no escape for me.' . . . Of course one



sympathises. Given the absurd position, one would feel the same oneself."

"Quite so. But what of Jacynth?"

"Ah, yes, that is the whole point—what of Jacynth?" said Walter quickly. "What do you think? Your voice sounds doubtful. Why, surely you believe she cares for him, don't you, Ag?"

"Oh, Walter, it is difficult to judge . . . really, I have no clear idea. What you have just told me gives me a clue to her state of mind. I can see that she has been deeply touched by his heroism, however clumsily executed. I know for certain that to see him alive will lift from her mind a weight which otherwise I think it probable she may never quite throw off . . . but as to her loving him . . . that is such a different thing, isn't it? You tell me that she openly avowed that she did not?"

"Certainly she did not, at the time of her marriage."

"No," reflected Agatha, "no, one sees that, of course. You remember he went down to the cottage with you, leaving her here alone all night. She may sincerely admire such altruism. But that she should desire to pass the rest of her life with the altruist is a different proposition, isn't it?"

Walter looked grave. "Just so."

"Well, what do you think of doing?"

"You agree, don't you, that they ought to meet?"

"Yes, yes, but don't raise his hopes too high."

"No. Well, I tell you what I think I will do. Let us take no risks. The tone of this letter shows he is in a queer frame of mind—you see, he is positively submerged in love of her, and thinks she hasn't any use for him."

"Yes—yes—poor boy!"

"Well, I doubt his plucking up courage to come here unless he is fetched; so I think I will go over to Tré-

guier and bring him here. I want him to know, before he sees her, what she has been doing. I want him to understand that d'Aubigny has gone to his account, that his own innocence has been proclaimed throughout the Dale, and that, please God, he has a long and useful life before him . . . and now, do you agree with me that Jacynth had better know nothing of his coming?"

"How shall you account for your absence?"

"Very easily. Tell her we have reconsidered our ideas about going to England—tell her what is the actual truth—that I have had a letter which has decided me to find out forthwith whether passports are to be obtained. I know I'm a mere man, Agatha, but I have an idea that Jass is as much in love as he is. But she doesn't know it herself. It is borne in upon me that the only way in which he could make certain would be to come upon her quite unexpectedly."

"Walter, isn't that dangerous? Suppose you raise his hopes—and suppose that she recoils from the sight of him."

"Is that really likely, do you think?"

"Oh, I can't tell. But I think I ought to prepare her a little."

"On no account," cried Walter with emphasis. "I forbid you to say a single word. Let him be prepared and confident, she unprepared and therefore off guard! She is so horribly guarded as a rule."

"But if she dashes him down?"

"She's much more likely to do that if he is too humble."

"Too humble! That doesn't sound like Ran!"

"But then Ran in love is a very different person. I tell you, Agatha, I have a strong opinion and I mean to back it. I am going to tell him of her pluck—of how she went out and caught that fellow, of how she



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worked to keep him alive until he had cleared Ran's name! I am going to fill him up with the idea of what she is and what she has done, and then let him come upon her suddenly and storm her defences! I assure you it's the only way!"



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### CHRISTOPHE SEES A GHOST

THE churchyard seemed very still to Jacynth on the following day. She had grown accustomed during that autumn to the endless circling and wheeling of the swallows on their southward flight. Now they were all gone, and there was a forsaken feeling about the tiny grey church and the uncouth memorials of the dead.

The weather was fine, and the sky faintly blue, but the beauty was like the smile that lingers upon dead lips. One knew that it was fading—was passing, as swiftly as the last shaft of light from the sinking sun across the edge of the world; and then must follow winter—sullen, lonely winter.

It had been a difficult business that morning to collect, after diligent search, any blossoms at all in the château garden. The few violets from the sunny border of the *potager*, and the one or two late roses from the house wall, held each of them that same faint dying grace—as if their breasts heaved, exhaling the last fragrance of dead summer—so honey-sweet and so rare were they.

Jacynth was alone to-day, for she had lent the unwilling Maurette to go an errand for Agatha. It was a thing so unusual for Miss Strickland to ask such a favour that it had to be granted with eagerness.

It was not merely her solitude—not merely the ethereal beauty of the day which were conspiring to make Mrs. Warristoun depressed. The previous evening,



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her friends, the Stricklands, had announced their decision to apply at once for passports and make a push to reach England in time for Christmas. There was no denying that the fact had startled Jacynth. Though urging them to leave her, she yet had not really supposed that they would do so—or, at least, not before the spring.

Now for the first time she faced the thought of the long, quiet winter days, with the empty house and the sound of the sea, and the ever-haunting thought of Ran. How he haunted her!

Coming up the garden path, chaffing the soldiers—standing in the sunshiny boudoir, shyly asking her whether she thought the view from the window beautiful, sitting there, avoiding her eyes, as he divulged to her his reasons for their marriage. . . .

“Had I said that—had he done this. . . .”

Over and over again the thoughts of what might have been teased her.

How silent the château had been in Walter's absence the night before! Agatha and she had sat together in the boudoir, while these mind pictures passed before her; and from the wall Laure de Kerlistec smiled her perennial smile. (“I don't think they ought *ever* to paint people smiling,” Jass had thought.)

Yet she felt as if she simply could not leave Kerlistec.

Something had there begun which was left unfinished. When Ranulf went out of that haunted room, in order, as she supposed, to give her time to collect herself, nothing had been further from her thoughts than that he had made his final exit. It had seemed imperative that the amazing interview should proceed. It had been a beginning, not an end—everything in her life had changed places, had taken on some startling new meaning. That the fresh clue would never be *followed up* was impossibly absurd.

There was something fascinating, absorbing, in the funny blunt way in which he had divulged his curious, boy-like plan. He had been manifestly dominated by a horror of seeming to strike a heroic pose—by a dread lest she might suppose him to be founding some claim upon what he had done.

And they had never reached the one reason that counted. . . .

He *must* come back and finish that scene!

Perhaps he would . . . even from the other world—could she bring him back by force of longing—just long enough to hear him say with his own voice what she had read in his letter?

Seated upon the low stone wall, arranging her scanty blooms in a tin garland-holder, she pondered the whole matter. It was better to bear the winter here than go back to the inquisitions of Mrs. Grice and her sisters. It was better to go melancholy mad in the solitude than to hear people pitying "poor dear Ran"—"so tragic—just as he was married, and was going to be so happy!"

The flowers were all in water. She wiped her damp hands, and gazed with a sigh at the sun, already so low that in half an hour it would be dusk. It was as though she had come to the end of everything—of the day, of summer, of youth, of—the word leaped at her—of love.

Is this love—this craving, this hunger of the soul, just for the touch of a hand and the sound of a voice? If not love itself, then at least Love-that-might-have-been. She thought of it tragically, as of a babe dead before birth.

She stooped over the grave, laying the garland upon it, and as she did so she heard a cry, in a croaking voice, and looking up, perceived over the wall the head and arms of a man, beckoning frantically. It was old Christophe the *taupier*, who was doing his utmost to



attract her attention, while he poured out a long statement of which she heard only a few words, though he spoke what he himself firmly believed to be French. "*Le revenant!*" She was to beware of the *revenant*—he himself, he who spoke to you had seen it, and that in the full light of day!

The old man crossed himself repeatedly, in an agony of fear.

"*Revenant!* Whose then was it, Christophe?" asked she kindly, as soon as he gave her a chance to speak.

Why, of course, it was the ghost of the young seigneur himself, just as he had prophesied must happen, ever since the calling down of that curse! Ah, people had no faith any more, they did not believe in curses—nobody now, except real Bretons, believed in the power of the Ankou—but the Ankou was nevertheless still alive and still powerful, although Monsieur the Curé had been so foolhardy as to take away his altar out of the church and substitute a statue of St. Jean du Doigt. But those who remembered the old days, knew where to find the altar of the Ankou, and no doubt he was very pleased when that Breton sailor, who turned out to be the last Comte de Kerlistec, went into the church and prayed to him just as though St. Jean du Doigt did not exist. He prayed for a curse upon the young seigneur, and everybody knew why. It was because the seigneur's father betrayed his friend, and took away his friend's wife. In the opinion of Christophe one could hardly say with justice that the young seigneur could be blamed for that; but there was no withstanding the power of the Ankou. If he undertook the ruin of anybody the thing was as good as done. And that sailor had prayed hard! Christophe knew, for he had watched him the whole time, both times, in fact—when he came in the daytime, and when he returned at dead of night. Thus it was not at all surprising, though

terrible, to see the *revenant* of the young seigneur this morning, for, little as he might deserve his fate, one could expect nothing else. But Christophe did not like to see the young lady in the graveyard, since it was there, more likely than anywhere else, that a *revenant* would appear.

This statement was very interesting to Jacynth from an academic point of view, for she had heard of the cult of the Ankou among the semi-pagan Breton peasantry. This is a figure of death, in the form of a human skeleton, holding a scythe. It was formerly to be seen in most rural churches, until the clergy united to stamp out so vindictive and unchristian a cult. Jass had heard Walter say that he could never persuade even Christophe to talk of it, so she was sensible of satisfaction in the *naïf* revelation.

"Why don't you want me to see the ghost, Christophe?" she asked calmly. "I should like to see it very much."

"Because—*ma Doué*—because it would be death to you! It would have come to fetch you!"

"Well, Christophe, if the ghost of the young seigneur does come to fetch me, he will find me quite ready to go with him. I would rather be in the other world with him than here by myself."

"Oh, saints, what an impiety! Enough to bring down a curse upon you without anything else!" shrilled the old *taupier*. "You so young and with such riches! What a horrible impiety!" In fact, the shock was too much for his French, and he lapsed into Breton, wherein she could not follow.

She had not moved from her station by the grave, and the old man stood on the further side of the wall, so that she had spoken to him aloud, and quite clearly. Now, in the midst of the torrent of words in which he



was remonstrating with her, he broke off short, pointed a shaking finger, yelled and took to flight.

She turned quickly, to see the *revenant* standing very near her—just the other side of the grave, in fact.

It is hardly surprising if she did, in the first minute, believe that she saw a vision. Ran was so white, and stood so still. The idea of his having climbed the low wall did not come to her, and his presence seemed miraculous—as though he had suddenly materialised. . . . Her mind swept back to their first meeting—in a churchyard, with a grave between.

For a moment neither could speak—he because of the thing he had just heard her say, she because the spell of the moment—the spell of Brittany and sunset and the vivid belief of the old peasant—was upon her; and for a long breathless instant she really thought that she was ghost-seeing. It seemed to her that she herself was passing into another plane of being—as a fact, she was on the point of fainting away—when Ran spoke and the magic was broken to atoms.

“What an old ass Christophe is—isn’t he?” said he, with an air of apology for the primitive habits of his Bretons.

The words clashed so violently with her own overpowering emotion that she cried out, half in terror, half in some other feeling, too mighty for her to cope with; and with great suddenness she sat down upon one of the boulders of the rock garden.

“Why, you are alive! You are alive!” she stammered.

Ran came near. He hesitated half a minute, then knelt down before her upon the grass, and took her hands in his. “Why, surely you didn’t believe what that old clown was gassing about?”

She snatched away her hands, dropped her forehead upon them and made no reply.

Cold fear suddenly invaded Ran's soul. "Jass, for God's sake, don't take it so hard! I—I thought this stunt of Walter's about taking you by surprise was no good! I assure you, if they had left me to decide, I wouldn't have come pestering you! I meant just simply to pass out, as far as you were concerned . . . but they seemed to think . . . the Stricklands did——"

She cut short his words with a brusque movement. Raising her head she laid her hands upon his shoulders, gripping them—leaned towards him, let her brow rest against his coat.

"Oh, go slowly—go slowly; let me *think*," she whispered, hardly knowing what she said. "You are here—it can't be true—here to go on with that talk—the talk we had only just begun when you went away and left me. Oh, Ran, there was so much to say, and you would not wait! Now—now—won't you be patient with me? Won't you give me time?"

He put his big arms tenderly about the bowed shoulders and laid his cheek down upon her hair. "Oh, my dear—as long as you like," he murmured chokingly. "Go on. Speak to me. Say what is in your mind."

She slipped her hands up and down over him as if to assure herself that he was solid—alive—there in actual presence. For quite a long time she could find no more words, but at last she said, like one eaten up with wonder:

"You see, I thought you were so different."

"You thought I was a cad. I behaved like one. There's no excuse except that I thought you were different too. I began all wrong. You see, before I ever saw you I found out that your father was swindling me, and I had heard—well, nothing much, but I took it for granted that the whole family was cut out in the same mould. The first time I saw you was in church, and I



thought what a little dear you looked. Then I came upon you philandering with Hector in the moonlight beside the lake, and I was enraged—I can't explain it, I never felt so furious in my life!—that you should wear this little face and be—and be just a common flirt. When I saw you alone there in the churchyard, I thought I would humiliate you a little . . . and I found out my mistake, then and there! . . . So, when I knew what you were like, I was determined to spoil Hector's game. My word, Jass, but you did churn me up! I never closed my eyes all that night; and by degrees this plan came into my head. Only I always meant it to end with your liking me a little. And yet I knew it was best as it was. If you had cared for me, it would have made it so awfully hard——"

"To leave me?"

"'M Jass"—his hold tightened about her, he caught his breath in a great gulp—"I'm a perfect fool about you! I simply can't, won't give you up! Are you going to let me stay?"

The sun sent a scarlet shaft of light—his last for that day—straight over the low churchyard wall, and lit up the little white face that Ran was searching so eagerly.

Jass answered him only with her eyes; but as he read their message his whole countenance changed completely, so that afterwards it never looked to his wife the same again. It was as though he dropped a mask and showed himself to her for the first time as he was. The hardness, the arrogance, the pretended indifference were wiped off, and the real Ranulf shone through—chivalrous, clean, courageous—a man to trust indeed.

As she felt his lips upon her own, she thought of Agatha's words in praise of his mouth. . . .

. . . And later, in the dark, when their tremulous, thrilling converse had hardened back into the bounda-



ries of speech, she whispered childishly: "I wanted dreadfully to see you again, because Agatha said you had a noble mouth—and I wanted to make sure that she was right."

"She wasn't right at the time," was her lover's swift reply. "But it is a noble mouth now. You have bestowed its patent of nobility."

Her delighted laugh still trembled with the force of the under-current. "At least I have unsealed your lips! You are speaking with new tongues!"

"This is my Pentecost," he answered, daring to voice thoughts which perhaps in broad daylight he would have been too shy to utter. "Jass, if you could have known the life I had been leading for four years in France—putting up a bluff with death all the time—growing harder and harder until I was completely brutalised. . . . You'll have to bear with me a good deal before I'm fit to come near you."

"But it's the loneliness I mind so much—that I'm so afraid of. Don't you know that the Stricklands are going to England, and leaving me here? I was feeling so miserable about it; but now that I have you——"

He could hardly credit his own good fortune.

"I thought," said he, "that my only epitaph would have to be 'Also Ran.' I never dreamed that I could so run as to obtain."

"Because you ran straight," she replied. "Ah, there is poor old Christophe, hovering about—not daring to come and save me from you, and expecting every moment to see us both disappear in a cloud of fire and brimstone. Come! Let us try and persuade him that you are not a ghost!" . . . and, when they stood outside the lych gate, she enfolded in the shelter of her husband's arm, she raised her voice a little, and cried *gladly*:



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"Christophe! The Ankou is dead! He is powerless, he has no more strength! St. Jean du Doigt has touched him with his holy finger; he can do no harm henceforward! The seigneur has come back!"

**THE END**





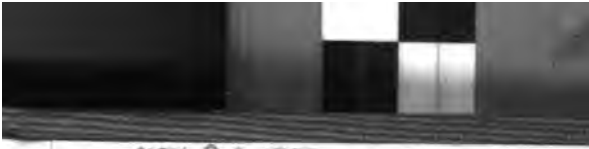
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